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TITUS 3:5 AND BAPTISMAL REGENERATION

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps no one doctrine in the Christian Church has received so much debate in recent years as the doctrine of baptism. The basic reason for this is its relevance in the discussion of the unity of the Church. This sacrament cannot be divorced from the doctrine of the Church because it is the sacrament of initiation into the Body of Christ. Consequently, with the growth of the ecumenical movement and the need to find common answers to basic questions it was inevitable that one of the most important questions to be debated at length should be: What is Baptism?

Any discussion of baptism has always been zeitgemaess because of the continuing debate on infant baptism which has been carried on with varying degrees of intensity since the Reformation. Recently, in 1943, Karl Barth put fuel on the fire with a lecture he delivered to a gathering of theological students in Switzerland. This was later published under the title Die Kirchliche Lehre von der Taufe and translated into English in 1948 as The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism.¹ The number of books, articles, and pamphlets on infant baptism and baptism generally which this pamphlet by

¹Translated by Ernest A. Payne (London: SCM Press, 1948). This pamphlet is discussed in Chapter IV of this thesis.

Barth provoked was phenomenal. Astonishing, too, was the variety of views expressed in these "answers" to Barth. Now that the heat of the debate has simmered down somewhat, it is helpful to reassess the doctrine of baptism in the light of the recent literature on the subject. This, in a way, has been partly the reason for this study.

However, to make a reassessment of the doctrine of baptism in all its aspects would prove to be a tremendous task, and it is doubtful whether such a general treatment would result in anything more than just another treatise on baptism. The variety and divergence of opinions expressed in recent literature on this doctrine has shown that a different approach to the problem is necessary, an approach which gets at the very heart of the doctrine and works from there. With this in mind it was decided to study baptism from the viewpoint of Titus 3:5, the New Testament's briefest summary statement on baptism, and its concept of baptismal regeneration. The understanding of this concept is surely fundamental to the whole doctrine of baptism, yet so often it has been regarded as merely peripheral.

The aim of this thesis, therefore, is to review the various interpretations of Titus 3:5 and baptismal regeneration throughout the history of the Church, to examine them in the light of their environments, and finally to reach a conclusion as to the meaning of Titus 3:5 and baptismal regeneration on the basis of an exegetical study of the text

in its historical background. It is contended that once a true understanding of baptismal regeneration has been reached other problems dealing with baptism will be readily resolved. It is also contended that with a right understanding of baptismal regeneration the danger of overemphasizing some particular aspect of baptism or following traditional lines of argument is considerably lessened.

This aim is thus also the limitation of this thesis. It is only intended to find the meaning of baptismal regeneration as the basis for the full understanding of baptism, but it is not the intention to answer in any detail such questions as infant baptism and the relationship of baptism to faith. In regard to infant baptism it may be stated here briefly that it is the belief of this writer that this subject can only be dealt with intelligently from the point of view of a right understanding of baptismal regeneration. Infant baptism is essentially a theological problem and thereby can never be fully answered by an historical study as so many have tried to do.

CHAPTER II

PRE-REFORMATION INTERPRETATION

The various ways in which Titus 3:5 was used and interpreted throughout the pre-Reformation era have had a profound influence on the Reformers and even on us today. From the interpretation of this text and John 3:5 the idea of baptismal regeneration grew further and further away from the New Testament idea until the rite of baptism was regarded as saving in itself, as having some kind of magical effect. Often the Church Fathers, as they adopted Christianity, brought with them the pagan philosophies they had learned and diluted Christianity to some extent with philosophical concepts. The objectivity of baptism, too, was sometimes lost and the subjective experience or attitude of the candidate toward baptism was often emphasized. Even with the coming of the Reformation these errors were not always rejected, or, in rejecting them, more subtle errors took their place. Thus in various forms these errors are still found in the Church today. It is therefore necessary to study the historical development of the interpretation of our text and of the concept of baptismal regeneration.

Interpretation of the Church Fathers to the Council of Nicea

No clear interpretation of Titus 3:5 can be found in the

extra-canonical literature before the writings of Justin Martyr. However, in the Odes of Solomon, probably written around the end of the first century, we find an indirect reference to baptism: "I became the Lord's own, by the name of the Lord, and was justified by his gentleness" (Ode 25:11). The "gentleness of the Lord" may well be an allusion to the *Χρηστότης καὶ φιλανθρωπία* of Titus 3:4,5.¹ In a further reference to baptism in the final Ode (42) where Christ descends into hell, He is depicted as entering the realm of death in order to baptize those who have died. The dead come to Him seeking His mercy, and Christ says: "I heard their voice; and My name I sealed upon their heads."² Obviously, the writer held very strongly that baptism was absolutely necessary for salvation, and hence those who had died in the pre-Christian era had to be baptized also if they were to be saved. Some of the later Church Fathers also give credence to this idea. It is found also in the early writing, the Shepherd of Hermas, where the Apostles and teachers descend into Hades after death to baptize the righteous souls of pre-Christian times.³ Also in the apocalyptic Epistle of the Apostles (second century)

¹ Joseph Crehan, Early Christian Baptism and the Creed: A Study in Ante-Nicene Theology (London: Burnes Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1950), p. 54.

² Ibid., p. 54.

³ The Shepherd of Hermas, Parable 9:16, Edgar J. Goodspeed, The Apostolic Fathers: An American Translation (London: Independent Press Ltd., c.1950), pp. 187, 188.

Jesus, in explaining why He went down to Hades, tells how He baptized the righteous who were there after He had preached to them:

I poured out upon them with my right hand the water of life and forgiveness and salvation from all evil, as I have done unto you and unto them that believe on me.⁴

Although this idea of the absolute necessity of baptism does not have any direct reference to baptismal regeneration, it nevertheless puts a wrong emphasis on the rite of baptism itself which finally led to an understanding that the sacrament has some sort of regenerative power in itself. There is a tendency to think that the regeneration comes primarily from the sacramental act and only secondarily from the work of Christ. However, in the Letter of Barnabas, written about 130 A.D., baptism and Christ's atoning work on the Cross are intimately connected, and those "who have set their hope on the cross and gone down into the water" are regenerated; they "go down into the water full of sins and pollution" and "come up bringing forth fear" in their hearts and "with hope in Jesus" in their spirit.⁵

Justin Martyr, writing about 150 A.D., leaves us a description of baptism in his First Apology. In this description he leans largely on John 3:5 for his terminology

⁴The Apocryphal New Testament: Being the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypses With Other Narratives and Fragments, newly translated by Montague Rhodes James (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 494.

⁵Letter of Barnabas 11:8,11; Goodspeed, p. 36.

and makes no direct reference to Titus 3:5. However, his combination in 1 Apology 61 of λουτρόν with ἀναγέννησις points toward a strong influence on Justin's thinking of the phrase λουτρόν παλιγγενεσίας from Titus 3:5.⁶ In 61:10 Justin explains that with the invocation of God's name at the water that person is baptized who "has chosen to be born again (ἀναγεννηθῆναι) and has repented of his sinful acts."⁷ Through the calling upon God's name in baptism the person thus baptized is no longer a child of necessity and ignorance which comes from natural birth, but becomes a son of free choice and knowledge and obtains remission of the sins he has already committed.⁸ In Chapter 66 Justin deals with the Eucharist and says that no one is allowed to partake of this except one who believes the Christian doctrine and has received "the washing for forgiveness of sins and for regeneration (τὸ ὑπὲρ ἀφέσεως ἁμαρτιῶν καὶ εἰς ἀναγέννησιν λουτρόν), and who lives as Christ handed down to us."⁹ In his Dialogue with Trypho (14:1) he calls baptism the "washing of repentance" (λουτρόν τῆς μετανόας) and remarks that it is "the only thing that can cleanse those who repent."¹⁰ So

⁶ ΒΙΒΛΙΟΘΗΚΗ ΕΜΗΝΩΝ ΠΑΤΕΡΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣΤΙΚΩΝ ΣΥΓΓΡΑΦΕΩΝ (Αθήναι : Εκδόσις τῆς Αποστολικῆς Διοκονίας τῆς Εκκλησίας τῆς Ελλάδος, 1956), III, 194.

⁷ Ibid., p. 195.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 197.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 220.

Justin certainly teaches a baptismal regeneration. But it is a regeneration which is connected very intimately with the knowledge of God, with faith, and with the desire to live according to God's will. His baptism is not only for the remission of past sins but also for the whole life of the Christian. Hence Justin can say: "This washing is called illumination ($\phi\omega\tau\iota\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$), since those who learn these things are illuminated within,"¹¹ and baptism is "the water of life."¹² But the regeneration in baptism for Justin does not come about through the water, nor through faith, although both are vitally necessary. It comes about through speaking the name of the Triune God, through the Word which cannot be separated from the water of baptism. Baptism is no outward sign of an inward change. The power of baptism comes from God through the Word and is something objective, yet it is inseparable from faith and the teaching and living of the Gospel. It takes the middle path between an ex opere operato regeneration and a subjective regeneration which is based primarily on faith. Justin can therefore speak of the baptismal washing as "the true circumcision"¹³ and look on infant baptism with favour.¹⁴

¹¹ 1 Apol. 61:12, ibid., p. 195.

¹² Dial. with Trypho 14:1, ibid., p. 220.

¹³ Dial. with Trypho 18:2, ibid., p. 224.

¹⁴ In 1 Apol. 15:6, Justin mentions "many men and women of the age of sixty and seventy years who have been disciples

Irenaeus of Lyons, who became bishop about 178 A.D., follows in the same tradition as Justin. Although he does not mention Titus 3:5 he continually uses its terminology. He speaks of a regeneratio in Deum,¹⁵ ἀναγέννησις εἰς θεόν,¹⁶ or lavacrum regenerationis.¹⁷ In his terminology and that of the ancient church in general regeneration becomes almost synonymous with baptism. A good example of this is found in his reference to Matthew 28:19 where he says: "And again, when he gave his disciples the commission of regenerating unto God, he said unto them, Go and teach all nations baptizethem" (Et iterum, potestatem regenerationis in Deum dans discipulis, dicebat eis, etc.)¹⁸ Again, when speaking of the blind man mentioned in John 9 whom Jesus healed and bade wash in the pool of Siloam, Irenaeus call this miracle a new creation and a baptism, the "washing of regeneration."

of Christ from childhood (οἱ ἐκ παιδων ἐμαρτυρήθησαν τῷ Χριστῷ)." Joachim Jeremias, Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries, transl. by David Cairns (London: SCM Press Ltd., c.1960), p. 72, asserts here that the passive of the word μαρτυρεῖν coming from Matt. 28:19, was used as the equivalent of to baptize by Justin. Thus these men and women mentioned by Justin would have been baptized as children (ἐκ παιδων).

¹⁵Adversus Haereses III:17:1; William Wall, The History of Infant Baptism: Together with Mr Gale's Reflections and Dr. Wall's Defence (Second edition by the Rev. Henry Cotton; Oxford: The University Press, 1844), I, 73.

¹⁶Adv. Haer. I:21:1; Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1883), II, 260.

¹⁷Adv. Haer. V:15:3; Wall, p. 74.

¹⁸Adv. Haer. III:17:1, Wall, p. 73.

He says: Simul et plasmationem et eam quae est per lavacrum regenerationis restituens ei,¹⁹ a clear reference to Titus 3:5. He, too, repeats the idea prevalent in these times that Christ descended into hell to baptize the Old Testament patriarchs (in sinum suum recipiens pristinos patres regeneravit eos in vitam Dei).²⁰ Thus he tends toward the view of the absolute necessity of baptism for salvation, because it is the means of bringing about regeneration. Truly, for Irenaeus, although faith is necessary, it does not play a very important role in baptism. There is not the emphasis on man's accepting by faith what baptism brings as there is that the Holy Spirit working through baptism gives him faith. Baptism is primarily God's act of regeneration and not man's act of faith. Through the Holy Spirit the one baptized receives fellowship with Christ. This fellowship is the basis for the Christian life and is a "union unto immortality" (ἑνωσις πρὸς ἀφθαρσίαν).²¹ But this breaks down and the Holy Spirit no longer abides in the baptized when the latter turns to unrighteous living.²² Perhaps the best known

¹⁹Adv. Haer. V:15:3; Wall, p. 74.

²⁰Adv. Haer. III:22:4; Schaff, p. 260.

²¹Adv. Haer. III:17:2; Augustus Neander, Lectures on the History of Christian Dogmas, edited by J. L. Jacobi, translated from the German by J. E. Ryland (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1858), I, 230.

²²Dem. 41, 42; John Lawson, The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus (London: The Epworth Press, c.1948), p. 267.

statement of Irenaeus is that pertaining to infant baptism, and this is where his teaching of baptismal regeneration comes out in its true light. While insisting that Jesus was the Christ from His birth he states:

For He came to save all by means of Himself: all, I say, who through Him are born again unto God, infants, and children, and boys and youths and old men. He therefore passed through every age becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age, being at the same time made to them an example of piety, righteousness and submission; a youth for youths, thus sanctifying them for the Lord.²³

Thus through baptism infants receive an objective regeneration. The Report of the Scottish Theologians is to the point here:

In it [baptism] we are born again unto God because we have already been born again in the birth and resurrection of Jesus Christ. . . . It is because the human life of Jesus belongs to our salvation that Irenaeus can offer a doctrine of infant Baptism as rebirth unto God, which is in complete accord with the rest of His [sic] biblical theology.²⁴

The "washing of regeneration" for Irenaeus, then, is a baptismal regeneration in which the person baptized is adopted as a child of God, redeemed by Christ his Lord, and

²³Adv. Haer. III:22:4--Omnes venit per semit ipsum salvare: omnes, inquam, qui per eum renascuntur in Deum, infantes, et parvulos, et pueros, et iuvenes, et seniores. Ideo per omnem venit aetatem, et infantibus infans factus sanctificans infantes, in parvulis parvulus, sanctificans hanc ipsam habentes aetatem, Wall, p. 230. Cf. Jeremias, p. 72, where he calls Irenaeus's terminology for baptism here "the quite unvarying terminology of the Church."

²⁴The Church of Scotland, Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism: May 1956 (Edinburgh: William Blackwell & Sons Ltd., 1956), pp. 14, 15.

sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Of course, if the person baptized denies his baptism, that is, does not live as an adopted child of God, does not accept the redemptive work of Christ, and refuses to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit, then he remains in his sin and is lost. In the case of an infant which is baptized, it must be said that it receives this adoption and sanctification too. Even though it may not be able to accept it with the conscious act of faith (which, after all, is only made possible through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit) yet neither can it consciously reject at this stage and must be regarded as regenerated until such time as it does so.

The Apologist Theophilus of Antioch, writing shortly after 180 A.D., mentions baptism as imparting remission of sins and regeneration. He uses the word *παλιγγενεσία* here and believes that this regeneration through the water of baptism was prefigured in the production of living beings from the waters on the fifth day of creation.²⁵ This is only an incidental reference but it helps to show what an important part regeneration was playing in the early understanding of baptism.

Following the earlier Church Fathers, Tertullian also continues to use the terminology of Titus 3:5 for baptism.

²⁵Ad Autocylus 2:16, cited in J. N. D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines (London: Adam & Charles Black, c.1958), p. 195.

He speaks of baptism as "that most holy washing of new birth" (illud sanctissimum lavacrum novi natalis)²⁶ and asserts in a later writing that Christian modesty derives its nature per lavacrum regenerationis.²⁷ However, he often changes in his understanding of this "washing of regeneration." At one time he speaks of the Holy Spirit being received in the sacrament and at another time he says that baptism only prepares one for the reception of the Holy Spirit.²⁸ On the one hand, he leans toward an ex opere operato doctrine of baptism and, on the other, he stresses faith and a deep repentance with humility, weeping, and fasting in order to obtain God's blessing and salvation. In order to explain the unity of water and the Spirit in baptism, he speaks of Spirit as a "corporeal substance" and says that man's soul, breathed into him by God, is of the same stuff. Thus the Spirit in baptism is grafted into the soul making a semi-physical change in man's nature. This change destroys the evil in

²⁶De Baptismo 20:5, Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani Opera: Pars I (Opera Catholica, Adversus Marcionem) in Corpus Christianorum Series Latina (Turnholti: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1954), I, 295.

²⁷De Pudicitia 1:5, ibid., Pars II (Opera Montanistica), II, 1281.

²⁸Vide De Baptismo 6, Tertullian's Treatises: Concerning Prayer, Concerning Baptism, Translated by Alexander Souter (London: SPCK, 1919), p. 54, where after previously saying that the Holy Spirit is received in baptism, he turns around and says: "I do not mean to say that we obtain the Holy Spirit in the water, but having been cleansed in the water, we are being prepared under the angel for the Holy Spirit."

man's nature and makes him free from guilt and punishment. Turning to the creation story where the Spirit of God broods over the waters and living beings come forth from them, Tertullian sees the same thing happening in baptism--the Holy Spirit comes upon the baptismal water and gives it power. He explains the process thus:

Every underlying substance must catch the quality of that which is suspended over it, particularly when the former is corporeal and the latter is spiritual, as the spiritual by the fineness of its substance can easily penetrate the corporeal, and also settle in it. So the nature of the waters, having been made holy from that which is holy, has itself also conceived the power to sanctify. . . . For immediately the Spirit comes from heaven over them, and is above the waters sanctifying them from itself, and being thus sanctified they imbibe the power of sanctifying. . . . Therefore when the waters have been treated in a certain way by the intervention of the angel, the spirit [of man] is bodily washed in the waters and the flesh is spiritually cleansed in the same.²⁹

This rather crude concept of baptismal regeneration makes it almost a magical rite and certainly lays the foundation for the later error that baptism itself causes regeneration ex opere operato. But Tertullian's obsession with the disciplinary life prevented him from going that far. Here again the Scottish Theologians analyse the situation well:

This debased baptismal regeneration is saved from becoming a mere mystery-rite by the emphasis put upon prior repentance and satisfaction for sins, but the damage has already been done. A materialization of grace and regeneration inevitably follows any confounding of the indwelling powers of the Spirit with the external rites. The whole sacrament is given a fatal

²⁹De Baptismo 4; Tertullian's Treatises, pp. 51, 52.

twist in the direction that is anthropological rather than Christological

And further:

Thus his emphasis comes to be laid not upon the objective event in the Incarnation, but upon the candidate's response, and not even upon the divine promise so much as upon his vows. For Tertullian, in fact, Baptism completes and seals our repentance in which "by mortification of our flesh and spirit we make satisfaction for our former sins" (de baptismo, 20).³⁰

Into this picture fits Tertullian's attitude toward infant baptism. Here, too, he felt the need to stress faith and repentance as a basis for baptism. Children can only be brought to Christ through instruction and teaching and they should not receive the sacrament till they know Christ and can shoulder the responsibility of their baptism:

Postponement of Baptism is most advantageous, particularly, however, in the case of children. . . . Let them become Christians, when they have been able to know Christ. Why hurries the age of innocence to the remission of sins? Shall we act more cautiously in worldly matters? Shall one to whom earthly substance is not entrusted, be entrusted with heavenly? Let them know how to seek salvation, so that you may be seen "to give to him that asketh."³¹

Later on, however, he may have changed his views on this and accepted infant baptism for those born of Christian parents.³²

In Egypt at the end of the second century Clement of

³⁰Church of Scotland, p. 17.

³¹De Baptismo 18; Tertullian's Treatises, p. 68.

³²Vide De Animo 39. Cf. on this point Jeremias, p. 84, and Kurt Aland, Did the Early Church Baptize Infants? Translated from the German by G. R. Beasley-Murray (London: SCM Press Ltd., c.1963), p. 66.

Alexandria, too, was quite familiar with the term regeneration as being synonymous with baptism. However, he does use the word *παλιγγενεσία* in a wider context, and it is not always clear whether he is referring to baptism or not. He uses the word in connexion with repentance when baptism is not being considered. For instance,

She who has committed fornication, lives to sin, but dies to the commandments; she who has repented, being as it were born again by conversion of life, has regeneration of life (*παλιγγενεσία ζωής*).³³

So also in the tract titled The Rich Man's Salvation he speaks of *διδούς μέγα παράδειγμα μετανοίας ἀληθινῆς καὶ μέγα ὄψιν μα παλιγγενεσίας*.³⁴ Nevertheless, baptism for Clement is a regeneration brought about by God working in man; this is brought out clearly in his comparison of baptism to the first creation. In his Extracts it is asked

whether baptism, being a sign of regeneration, is not a going forth from matter through the teaching of the Saviour, a strong, and mighty, and incessant wind bearing us along? Thus the Lord bringing us out of disorder illuminates us, leading us to the light which has no shade, not to the material light. As all generation is by the water and the Spirit, so is regeneration. 'For the Spirit of God was borne over the abyss.' And on this account our Saviour, though He Himself needed not baptism, was baptized, in order that He might sanctify all water, to those who are born again. Thus we are purified not only in the body, but also in the soul.³⁵

³³Quoted by John Kaye, Some Account of the Writings and Opinions of Clement of Alexandria (London: Griffith Forran Okeden & Welsh, n.d.), p. 260.

³⁴The Rich Man's Salvation 42; Clement of Alexandria: With an English Translation by G. W. Butterworth (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1960), p. 364.

³⁵Extracts 5,7,8; quoted by Kaye, p. 262.

Also in his Stromata he asserts that one must become as a child knowing the true Father "regenerated through water; and this is a different begetting than that in creation."³⁶

The regenerating power, of course, is the Holy Spirit working through the Word,³⁷ and so baptism brings about a new man created unto God:

Being baptized we are enlightened, being enlightened we are made sons, being made sons we are consecrated (τελειούμεθα), being consecrated we are made mortal. . . . So this work is frequently called grace, and enlightenment and consecration and washing (λουτρόν); washing through which we are made clean of sins³⁸

Clement makes no mention of infant baptism, being concerned primarily with baptism which follows instruction. But even then the emphasis remains on the working of the Holy Spirit through the sacrament although the catechetical instruction is necessary. He thus describes the effects of baptism:

Our transgressions are remitted by one sovereign medicine, the baptism according to the Word (λογικῷ βαπτισματι). We are cleansed from all our sins, and cease at once to be wicked. This is our grace of illumination, that we are no longer the same in conversation (τὸν τρόπον) as before we were washed; inasmuch as knowledge rises together with illumination, shining around the understanding; and we who were without learning (ἄμαθῆς) are constantly styled learners (μαθηταί), this learning having at some former time been conferred upon us; for we cannot name the precise time; since catechetical instruction leads to

³⁶Stromata 3:12:87 quoted by Johannes Quasten, Patrology (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1953), II, 27.

³⁷Kaye, p. 259.

³⁸Paidagogos 1:6:26; ΒΙΒΛΙΟΘΗΚΗ ΕΛΛΗΝΩΝ ΠΑΤΕΡΩΝ, V, 92.

faith, and faith is instructed by the Holy Spirit in baptism.³⁹

Through the sacrament man is so completely renewed that Clement sees no real distinction between body and soul in this renewal: "Our flesh is said to be precious, being regenerated by water."⁴⁰ It would be easy to mistake this for a magical rite or to understand it in the sense of a physical change along the lines of Tertullian. However, Clement never goes that far but continues more in the traditional line of thought. Basically, he does not differ from Justin or Irenaeus in the concept of baptismal regeneration.

Hippolytus of Rome, who was a student of Irenaeus, follows his teacher in using the terminology of Titus 3:5 for the baptismal rite. The phrase λουτρὸν τῆς καλλιγενεῖας or λουτρὸν καλλιγενεῖας is found often and is his usual term for baptism. However, in his Apostolic Tradition, written about 215 A.D., Hippolytus crams the baptismal rite with exorcisms, fastings, renunciations of Satan, and anointings with oil. Of course, he is not alone in this, and this factor has led some scholars to believe that there is an alternative tradition to that stemming from St. Paul, a tradition finding its roots in a section of the primitive church where the abolition of the Old Testament ceremonial law was not fully

³⁹Quoted by Kaye, p. 259.

⁴⁰Ibid.

understood as it was by St. Paul.⁴¹ Yet Hippolytus does not make the mistake of belittling baptism for the sake of these other things. They remain always secondary and their purpose seems to be to elevate the rite of baptism to a more solemn and impressive sacrament. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit works only through the baptismal act. A man may come to faith through instruction and may be purified through exorcisms but it is through the "washing of regeneration" that he is born anew and sealed by the Holy Spirit unto God.⁴² Hippolytus suggests that the instruction period prior to baptism should be about three years and then if the catechumen has proved his faith by good conduct he is ready for the sacrament:

And when they are chosen who are set apart to receive Baptism, let their life be examined, whether they live piously while catechumens, whether they 'honoured the widows,' whether they visited the sick, whether they have fulfilled every good work. If those who bring them bear witness to them that they have done thus, let them hear the Gospel. Moreover from the day they are chosen, let a hand be laid on them and let them be exorcised daily. And when the day draws near on which they are to be baptized, let

⁴¹ R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, "On the Baptismal Rite According to St. Hippolytus," Studia Patristica, Vol II: Papers Presented to the Second International Conference on Patristic Studies held at Christ Church, Oxford, 1955, Part II, edited by Kurt Aland and F. L. Cross, Vol. LXIV in Texte und Untersuchungen der altchristlichen Literatur, edited by Kurt Aland, Walther Eltester und Erich Klostermann (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957), pp. 102, 103.

⁴² Concerning Christ and the Antichrist LIX and Concerning the End of the World I, ΒΙΒΛΙΟΝ ΚΑΙ ΕΛΛΗΝΟΝ ΠΑΤΕΡΩΝ, VI, 217, 218, and 276.

the bishop exorcise each one of them that he may be certain that he is purified. But if there is one who is not pure let him be put on one side, because he did not hear the word of instruction with faith, for the strange spirit remained in him.⁴³

This, however, does not mean that the power of baptism comes from personal faith or must rest upon it, for Hippolytus does not exclude infants from baptism. He goes on:

And at the hour when the cock crows they shall first pray over the water. And they shall put off their clothes. And they shall baptize the little children first. And if they can answer for themselves, let them answer. But if they cannot, let their parents answer, or someone from their family.⁴⁴

After the people have been baptized confessing their faith they are anointed with the oil of thanksgiving in the name of Jesus Christ, they dry themselves, get dressed and go into the church. There the bishop lays his hands upon them and says:

O Lord God, who didst count these worthy of the forgiveness of sins through the laver of regeneration of the Holy Spirit, send upon them Thy grace, that they may serve Thee according to Thy will; to Thee be glory, to the Father and to the Son with the Holy Spirit in the Holy Church, both now and world without end. Amen.⁴⁵

This, obviously, is a strong echo of Titus 3:5-7 where baptism, the renewing work of the Holy Spirit, and justification by grace are closely tied up together. So although Hippolytus adds a number of liturgical acts to the sacrament, his basic

⁴³Apostolic Tradition 20; The Church of Scotland, Interim Report, 1956, p. 24.

⁴⁴Apostolic Tradition 21, ibid.

⁴⁵Apostolic Tradition 22, ibid., p. 25.

teaching on baptismal regeneration remains the same as that of the earlier Fathers.

When we take a look at Origen's view on baptismal regeneration we do find deeper insights and an occasional different emphasis but no basic changes from the traditional line. Jean Danielou sees in this a point worth remembering for the whole of Origen's teaching on baptism--

the fact that there was a definite tradition in the community about those doctrines even at that period. Also in the case of Baptism, Origen had soaked himself in the common tradition when he was a catechist.⁴⁶

Origen certainly stresses that baptism is for the remission of sins but he is quick to point out too that only those receive this remission who are worthy of it, who have sincerely repented and strive to live pure lives. However, it is still a source of divine grace, a symbol of the cleansing of the soul from all filth and evil which can bring about faith in the baptized. Thus the same "amazing *δυναμεις*" which Christ showed when healing sickness and infirmity and which brought about faith in those who received this grace is seen in baptism also.⁴⁷ Origen, in his Homilies on Exodus, makes another parallel between the deliverance of Israel from the

⁴⁶ Jean Danielou, Origen, translated by Walter Mitchell (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), p. 52.

⁴⁷ Commentary on John VI:xxxiii:166; Origenes Werke, IV, Der Johanneskommentar, in Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der Ersten Drei Jahrhunderte, herausgegeben von der Kirchen Vaeter--Commission der Koenigl. Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1903), X, 142, 143.

Egyptians in the crossing of the Red Sea and the deliverance of Christians from the devil's power when taken up into Christ by baptism in water and the Holy Spirit. The Israelite thus renounces through the water the rule of the Egyptians and accepts the rule and guidance of God, the Christian thus renounces through water the rule of Satan and accepts the kingship of Christ.⁴⁸ The terminology of Titus 3:5 also features prominently in Origen's references to baptism, λουτρὸν τῆς καθάρσεως again regularly being used as a synonym for βαπτισμῶς. He speaks of the body as well as the soul being sanctified through the "washing of regeneration" which is no longer mere water but a divine baptism sanctified by the name of the Triune God;⁴⁹ he speaks of the seed of man being cultivated and watered to bear good fruit by the "washing of regeneration";⁵⁰ he speaks of Christ Jesus cleansing moral lepers with the sacrament of baptism, the "washing of regeneration."⁵¹ But perhaps Origen's greatest contribution to the understanding of baptismal regeneration is to be found in his Commentary on St. Matthew on the meaning of καθάρσεως in Matthew 19:28. There he brings

⁴⁸ Danielou, p. 56.

⁴⁹ Bruchstuecke aus Catenen XXXVI, John 3:5: Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftstellen, X, 512.

⁵⁰ Die Selbststaendigen Fragmente aus der Prophetenkatene Nr. XXVI. Jerem. 27,16; ibid., VI, 211,212.

⁵¹ Homilia XXXIII; ibid., XLIX, 187.

out clearly the eschatological aspect of baptism, seeing the regeneration of baptism perfected in the complete regeneration of the resurrected life with God:

There is perhaps no-one according to our natural birth ($\gammaένεσις$) who is pure from pollution, although his life be but of one day. For the mystery of our natural birth is such that each of all that come into this birth can say that which was said by David in the fiftieth Psalm thus: 'I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me.'

But in the regeneration by washing ($τὴν ἐκ λουτροῦ παλινγενεσίαν$) everyone who is born from above by water and the Spirit is pure from pollution. He is pure, I venture to say, as through a glass darkly. And according to that other regeneration ($παλινγενεσία$) when the Son of man shall sit on His throne in His glory everyone that comes into that regeneration in Christ will be absolutely pure ($καθαρώτατος$) from pollution, face to face; and it is through the washing of regeneration that he comes to that other regeneration.⁵²

It is through baptism, therefore, that one receives a new life in Christ and becomes a son of God, but this new life is only perfected and the sonship only reaches its fulfilment in the regeneration of the life to come. This idea is very important for Origen's view of the ongoing process of baptism--the new life of baptism must be lived in this life if it is to be perfected in the life to come. Baptism is only the source of the new life and must be nurtured continuously by faithfulness to Christ for

not all who have been washed in the water have therefore been washed by the Holy Spirit. . . . There were catechumens in the Bible who were found worthy to have

⁵²From the Greek quoted in Wall, I, 121.

the grace of the Holy Spirit after Baptism, while others were not.⁵³

Origen takes a very strong stand on infant baptism contending that the Church has received this as a tradition from the Apostles, and there is no reason for discrediting his word here.⁵⁴ His arguments for infant baptism are always based on the need children have for the forgiveness of original sin. Thus with Origen we see a continuation along the traditional line with perhaps a fuller interpretation of baptismal regeneration and infant baptism.

With Cyprian of Carthage also (died 258 A.D.) the terminology of Titus 3:5 is central in his teaching on baptism. He places a very strong emphasis on baptism in his theology and sees no regeneration outside of baptism. This sacrament is, therefore, absolutely necessary for salvation. But in his baptismal teaching we see a transition which had begun in some of the earlier Fathers, coming closer to its maturity--a transition away from the New Testament church. For the emphasis in baptism is no longer upon one's putting on Christ and being changed by the whole impact of His saving work but rather upon one's incorporation into the visible Church through which alone the Holy Spirit works and regen-

⁵³Hom. Num. III, 1 in Danielou, p. 58.

⁵⁴For references in Origen's works to infant baptism see Kurt Aland, p. 47. However, Aland is certainly without foundation when he tries to show that Origen was making an appeal to a tradition he had dreamed up for the occasion.

erates those who enter it by baptism. Of course, he believes baptism is a putting on of Christ but this only comes about through the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Catholic Church.⁵⁵ Cyprian was led into this extreme position in order to find justification for his attitude towards heretics whose baptism he rejected. He certainly believed that a person baptized into the Church was born again, made alive unto a new life by the washing of saving water (in nouam uitam lauacro aquae salutaris animatus)⁵⁶ and that, because baptism and rebirth are inseparable, the person remained unrighteous until baptism had regenerated him.⁵⁷ The regeneration is primarily a purging of the old contagion of sin (contagio antiqua) so that "there remains those things alone which are of virtue and of the Spirit for glory."⁵⁸ Thus when we pray Hallowed be Thy Name, says Cyprian, we are praying that it may be hallowed among us and by our lives, that "we who are made holy in baptism may persevere in that which we begin to be."⁵⁹ Baptism, once

⁵⁵Epistulae LXXIIII:5; S. Thasci Caecili Cypriani Opera Omnia, recenuit et Commentario Critico instruxit Guillelmus Hartel, in Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vindobonae: Apud C. Geroldi Filium Bibliopolam Academiae, 1868), III, 803.

⁵⁶Ad Donatum 3; ibid., p. 5.

⁵⁷Testim. III:25,65; ibid., pp. 140, 167.

⁵⁸De habitu virginum 2,23; ibid., pp. 188, 204.

⁵⁹De dominica oratione 12; ibid., p. 275.

undergone, is an ever-present and constant operation in the person bestowing anew the image of God in him for a life of mercy and righteous deeds.⁶⁰ Cyprian never dealt with the question of the relationship of faith to baptism, but it cannot be said from this that he taught an ex opere operato doctrine. However, he certainly helped to pave the way for this doctrine in his teaching about the giving of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament. Truly, the Holy Spirit is received in baptism, he would say, but only if the baptism is administered by a bishop of the Catholic Church. Valid baptism could not be administered by a heretic as he would not have the Holy Spirit to impart. Cyprian contends that only the Spirit-endowed bishop could cleanse and sanctify water to make it the effectual water of baptism, and he quotes Ezekiel 36:25-27 and Number 19:22 as proof-texts for this. In the same instance he refers to a question asked at baptism: "Do you believe in life eternal and in the remission of sins through the Holy Church," as an indication that the remission of sins cannot be given except within the Church Catholic.⁶¹ Here he disagreed with Pope Stephanus who believed that the remission of sins and the second birth could come about through the baptism of heretics, although he had to agree

⁶⁰ De opere et eleemosynis 2; ibid., p. 374.

⁶¹ Epistulae LXX:1,2; ibid., pp. 767, 768.

that the Holy Spirit could not be found in these heretics.⁶²

But Cyprian argues against the logic of this:

quasi possit aut sine spiritu Christus indui aut a Christo spiritus separari. illud quoque ineptum, ut cum natiuitas secunda spiritalis sit, qua in Christo per lauacrum regenerationis nascimur, dicant quod possit quis apud haereticos spiritaliter nasci, ubi spiritum negent esse. peccata enim purgare et hominem sanctificare aqua sola non potest, nisi habeat et spiritum sanctum. quare aut et spiritum necesse est ut concedant esse illic ubi baptisma esse dicunt, aut nec baptisma est ubi spiritus non est, quia baptisma esse sine spiritu non potest.⁶³

Quoting Titus 3:5 he further states his case:

Baptisma enim esse in quo homo uetus moritur et nouus nascitur manifestat et probat beatus apostolus dicens: seruauit nos per lauacrum regenerationis. si autem in lauacro id est in baptismo est regeneratio, quomodo generare filios Deo haeresis per Christum potest quae Christi non sponsa est? ecclesia est enim sola quae Christo coniuncta et adunata filios generat.⁶⁴

Thus Cyprian's stand in this matter led him to stress some wrong emphases---emphases which later led to a wrong conception of baptismal regeneration. Even here Cyprian has placed the emphasis more on the power of the Catholic bishop than on the gracious act of God through Christ in baptism. Further light is thrown on his understanding of baptismal regeneration in his Epistle 64 which is his answer to Bishop Fidus who had asked the question whether the baptism of infants could not be left till the eighth day after birth so as to be a

⁶²Epistulae LXXV:8; ibid., p. 815.

⁶³Epistulae LXXIII:5; ibid., p. 803.

⁶⁴Epistulae LXXIII:6; ibid., p. 804.

parallel with the Old Testament rite of circumcision. The argument of Fidus was that infants are still too repulsive to give them the kiss of peace, which accompanies baptism, on the second or third day after birth. Cyprian's reply was to reject his arguments and to say that no one is to be withheld from baptism and the grace of God, for if the gravest transgressors who have committed many actual sins against God can receive the remission of sins in baptism so much the more should infants who have only original sin in them. Cyprian therefore demands that infants should be baptized on the second or third day after birth to cleanse them from original sin.⁶⁵ The objectivity of baptismal regeneration is thus emphasized.

Thus already in the Ante-Nicene Fathers we see the seeds of change planted in the doctrine of baptism. The objectivity of the baptismal regeneration has been stressed from the very beginning, but the emphasis has moved somewhat from the high plane of the gift of God of incorporation into Christ, with the consequent changes that must bring about in man, to the low level of an almost magical cleansing through a baptismal rite which receives its power through the performance of a Catholic bishop. Of course, Cyprian may have agreed with a man like Justin Martyr but nevertheless he was lessening the work of Christ in baptismal regeneration through his false

⁶⁵Epistulae LXIII:5,6; ibid., pp. 720, 721.

emphases and was adding something of a magical quality to the sacrament. This seed was to bear its various fruits in later times. Throughout this period, however, Titus 3:5 has remained the vital text in the various expressions of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration.

Interpretation of the Church Fathers from the Nicene
Period to the Time of Augustine

As Cyprian of Carthage was led by his fight against heresy to lean toward an erroneous concept of baptism, so Athanasius of Alexandria (295-373 A.D.) in his fight against the Arian heresy was led to a more biblical concept of baptism. The Arian controversy was, of course, centred in Christ and His divinity, and this led Athanasius to find Christ central in the doctrine of baptism. He contended that not only the atoning death of Christ was of consequence, but the whole of His humanity and divinity must also be taken into account in the sacrament. For Christ was born to change our natural birth to a new birth joined to Him that we might cast off the old life of the flesh by which we return to dust and be born again from above of water and the Spirit. Thus being made alive in Christ, we might be brought to heaven by Him.⁶⁶ In baptism, therefore, we put off the old life and put on the new life which is incorporated in and

⁶⁶Oratio III Contra Arianos 33; Sancti Athanasii Opera Dogmatica Selecta, in Bibliotheca Patrum Graecorum Dogmatica: Ad Optimorum Librorum Fidem Edendam, curavit Joannes Carolus Thilo (Lipsiae: T. O. Weigel, 1853), I, 532.

patterned on the whole life of Christ including His birth, baptism, earthly sojourn, death, and resurrection. Athanasius understood baptismal regeneration to be an ongoing process, a continual growth, strengthened and made perfect through the Holy Spirit. Hence he could speak in the present tense of "those who are in the process of being born again through the washing of regeneration (ἀναγεννωμένοις διὰ λουτροῦ Παλιγγενεσίας)." ⁶⁷ In this "holy washing" (ἅγιον λουτρόν) he who is baptized by the Father, is baptized by the Son and "is made perfect by the Holy Spirit." ⁶⁸ Here again it must be noted that the terminology of Titus 3:5 is prominent in the baptismal references. Athanasius used this text frequently not only to point out the divinity of Christ but also to stress the unity of the Trinity. For the Father, he said, creates and renews all things through Christ in the Holy Spirit. ⁶⁹ He also quoted the text to show that the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of holiness and renewal (ἀνακαινότης) and that God renews His creatures and makes them holy by the Holy Spirit through baptism. ⁷⁰ The Holy Spirit's work in baptism continues right through the life of the baptized, perhaps coming to them in special ways such as the laying on

⁶⁷ Epistola I Ad Serapionem 4; ibid., I, 678.

⁶⁸ Oratio II Contra Arianos 41; ibid., I, 372.

⁶⁹ Epistola I Ad Serapionem 24; ibid., I, 728.

⁷⁰ Epistola I Ad Serapionem 24; ibid., I, 722-24.

of hands which should not be understood as separate acts but as the continuing work of baptism.⁷¹ Athanasius took it for granted that anyone baptized would live up to his baptism and if he did not and transgressed he would be guilty of blasphemy against the Trinity.⁷² The contribution Athanasius made, therefore, to the understanding of baptismal regeneration was that he discarded the semi-magical conception popular at his time and restored the biblical emphasis of a God-given incorporation into Christ--His life, death, and resurrection.

The role Titus 3:5 plays in the liturgies of the Church from this time on is important because the liturgies often incorporated the popular doctrinal beliefs rather than the theological concepts of scholars. Through this medium it can be seen how great the differences were between the two. The liturgies often conveyed the magical concept of baptism teaching that through the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the water, the baptismal water was given a power of its own. This idea comes out in the baptismal prayers of Bishop Serapion of Thmuis to whom Athanasius had addressed a number of his Epistolae. Take for example Serapion's prayer for the sanctification of the waters:

Look down from heaven and behold these waters and fill them with Holy Spirit. Let thine ineffable Word come to be in them and transform their energy and cause them to be productive (by) being filled with thy grace, in

⁷¹Epistola I Ad Serapionem 6; ibid., I, 684.

⁷²Epistola IV Ad Serapionem 4; ibid., I, 794-96.

order that the mystery which is now being celebrated may not be found in vain in those that are being born again, but may fill all those that go down and are baptized with the divine grace.⁷³

Elsewhere Serapion is content to refer to baptism simply as "this divine regeneration"⁷⁴ or by using the terminology of Titus 3:5.⁷⁵ These prayers were used as part of the baptismal liturgy of the Church and show that the popular interest was primarily in the power of the baptismal water and only secondarily in the power of God and the whole meaning of baptism.

Basil of Caesarea (330-79 A.D.), otherwise known as Basil the Great, speaks of baptismal regeneration in his writing, "On the Holy Spirit." There he describes it (without any direct reference to Titus 3:5 but using the word *παλιγγενεσία*) as the beginning of the second life. This regeneration comes about through the adoption of Christ's death and resurrection in baptism and through the consequent working of the Holy Spirit. Water is used in baptism to carry out the symbolism of dying and being buried with Christ. There is no special power inherent in the water itself. However, the Holy Spirit is present in baptism to give the first installment of the new or second life thus releasing the person being baptized from

⁷³ Serapion, Prayers 7; Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy, edited by E. C. Whitaker (London: SPCK, 1960), p. 74.

⁷⁴ Serapion, Prayers 15; *ibid.*, p. 76.

⁷⁵ Serapion, Prayers 16; *ibid.*

sin which only bore the fruit of death and giving him life which bears its fruit in holiness. This is regeneration or being born again of water and the Spirit. Basil contends that just as it is necessary for death to be the divider between earthly life and life eternal so it is necessary to have the symbol of death in the descent into the water dividing the first life from the new life in Christ which follows baptism. The regeneration which the Holy Spirit brings about in baptism is described as an illumination and the receiving in abundance of all spiritual gifts which will be perfected in the life to come. Those baptized are now citizens in Christ's kingdom and must strive to bear fruits of that kingdom.⁷⁶ Basil also was careful not to separate faith from baptism. As far as he was concerned faith and baptism are two sides of salvation which are intimately connected and inseparable. For faith is perfected in baptism, and baptism is established through faith.⁷⁷ Basil is concerned that baptismal regeneration be recognised as the working of the Holy Spirit and not attributed to some magical power in the water.

Gregory of Nazianzus (died c.390 A.D.), a friend of Basil and his brother Gregory of Nyssa, became one of the

⁷⁶ On the Holy Spirit XV:35; The Book of Saint Basil the Great, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, On the Holy Spirit Written to Amphilochius, Bishop of Iconium, against the Pneumatomachi: A Revised Text with Introduction and Notes, edited by C. F. H. Johnston (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), pp. 74-76.

⁷⁷ On the Holy Spirit XII:28; *ibid.*, p. 64.

champions of Nicene orthodoxy against the Arians. As might be expected, his approach to baptismal regeneration is along traditional lines. In an oration on the Holy Spirit he contends that the Spirit certainly is God as a person of the Trinity and hence to be worshiped. Otherwise, he says, how could the Spirit deify anyone in baptism? Thus he sums up his position:

Indeed, from the Spirit comes our new birth and from the new birth our new creation, and from the new creation our deeper knowledge of the dignity of Him from whom it is derived.⁷⁸

Although he had only been baptized in adulthood himself he argued strongly for infant baptism saying that the consecration and divine seal should not be withheld from infants. Instead of fearing human weakness one should rather trust in God.⁷⁹ Thus the objectivity of baptism is upheld.

Basil's younger brother, Gregory of Nyssa (died A.D. 394), had not intended entering the Church at first but with encouragement from Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus he did so later and became one of the leading theologians of his time. His best and most important work was his great Catechetical Oration in which he gives us his teaching on baptism. Baptism, he states is necessary for eternal life. The first

⁷⁸Fifth Theological Oration: On the Spirit 28; Christology of the Later Fathers, edited by Edward Rochie Hardy, in The Library of Christian Classics (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1954), III, 211.

⁷⁹Philip Schaff, III, 483.

birth was only for mortal existence and therefore a second birth which is incorruptible is necessary for immortal life. This second birth comes about through baptism--"by prayer to God and invocation of heavenly grace and water and faith."⁸⁰ Regeneration in baptism is simply the act of God who transforms what is born in a corruptible nature into a state of incorruption.⁸¹ How does one know that God is present in the baptismal act? Gregory answers that quite simply:

He [God] has promised always to be present with those who call upon him, to be among believers, to abide with them all, and to be intimate with each of them. In the light of this we can need no further proof that the divine is present in the rite of baptism.⁸²

Important to Gregory's understanding of baptismal regeneration is his idea of the relationship of faith and water to the power of baptism. Water, first of all, is merely the earthly natural element which God uses to appropriate His salvation to man. It is not water which bestows the gift but the command of God and the visitation of the Spirit which comes sacramentally to set man free. Water serves only to express the cleansing.⁸³ Faith is the other element which God uses so that the regeneration may be a personal appropriation.

⁸⁰Catechetical Oration 33; Hardy, Christology of the Later Fathers in The Library of Christian Classics, III, 312.

⁸¹Ibid., III, 313.

⁸²Catechetical Oration 34; ibid.

⁸³On the Baptism of Christ, in A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), V, 519.

Faith and water must always remain secondary to the act of God in Christ for

the manner of our salvation owes its efficacy less to instruction by teaching than to what he who entered into fellowship with man actually did. In him life became a reality, so that by means of the flesh which he assumed and thereby deified salvation might come to all that was akin to it.⁸⁴

Yet no true baptism takes place if the person baptized does not show in his life that he had been regenerated. A new way of life must of necessity follow the act of baptism. This does not mean that there is going to be any physical change. Yet the grace of rebirth does in some way refashion man, so one must inquire what this change is. Gregory gives his answer:

Now it is clear that when the evil characteristics of our nature are done away, there is a change for the better. If, then, as the prophet says, when we undergo this sacramental 'washing' we become 'clean' in our wills and wash away the 'iniquities' of our souls, we become better and are changed for the better. But if the washing has only affected the body, and the soul has failed to wash off the stains of passion, and the life after initiation is identical with that before, despite the boldness of my assertion I will say without shrinking that in such a case the water is only water, and the gift of the Holy Spirit is nowhere evident in the action. . . . A man, then, who remains the same and yet prattles to himself about the change for the better he has undergone in baptism, should attend to what Paul says: 'If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.' For you are not what you have become; whereas the gospel says of the regenerate that 'he gave all those who received him the power to become God's children.' Now the child born of someone certainly shares his parent's nature. If, then, you have received

⁸⁴ Catechetical Oration 35; Hardy, III, 314. Cf. also Catechetical Oration 36; ibid., III, 318.

God and become his child, let your way of life testify to God within you; make it clear what your Father is!⁸⁵

Following Origen, Gregory of Nyssa looks upon baptismal regeneration as the source and origin of the final resurrection. This eschatological aspect gives the doctrine its completeness, and also its overall importance: "It is not possible," says Gregory, "for a man to attain to the resurrection apart from the regeneration by washing."⁸⁶ Gregory does not mention Titus 3:5 but following in the tradition he uses its terminology frequently and gives us a clear and systematic presentation of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration.

Cyril of Jerusalem (died 386 A.D.) often speaks of baptism as τὸ λουτρὸν τῆς παλιγγενεσίας and follows generally in the accepted tradition of baptismal regeneration. In his Procatechesis he thus describes the sacrament:

Great indeed is the Baptism which is offered you. It is a ransom to captives; the remission of offences; the death of sin; the regeneration of the soul [παλιγγενεσία ψυχῆς]; the garment of light; the holy seal indissoluble; the chariot to heaven; the luxury of paradise; a procuring of the kingdom; the gift of adoption.⁸⁷

With the invocation of the Trinity the water becomes the water of salvation, and the baptismal font is looked upon as

⁸⁵ Catechetical Oration 40; ibid., III, 324.

⁸⁶ Catechetical Oration 35; ibid., III, 317.

⁸⁷ Procatechesis 16; St. Cyril of Jerusalem's Lectures on the Christian Sacraments: The Procatechesis and the Five Mystagogical Catecheses, edited by F. L. Cross (London: SPCK, 1951), pp. 10, 20.

a grave into which the one baptized is placed to be born again to a new life--a foretaste of the final death and resurrection to eternal life. For baptism not only gives remission of sins but it also conveys the gift of the Holy Spirit and appropriates to the person baptized the atoning work of Christ, "a communion in representation with Christ's true sufferings."⁸⁸ Essentially, this gives the baptizand a new attitude to life, a turning from sorrow to joy. The holy washing of regeneration is a casting off of the old man and a being clothed in Jesus Christ, the garment of salvation, and a carrying out of righteous deeds.⁸⁹

Theodore of Mopsuestia, who died 428 A.D., leans a little towards the magical concept of baptismal regeneration although he keeps to the traditional terminology. He contends that water in baptism, once consecrated by the benediction of the priest, is no longer ordinary water but water of the second birth because the Holy Spirit has come upon it in the benediction. So he explains to candidates for baptism:

For this it is necessary that the priest should have beforehand made use of clear words, according to the rite of the priestly service, and asked God that the grace of the Holy Spirit might come on the water and impart to it the power both of conceiving that

⁸⁸ Mystagogical Catechesis II: The Baptismal Rite 4; ibid., pp. 19, 20.

⁸⁹ Mystagogical Catechesis I: The Pre-Baptismal Rites 10; ibid., p. 17.

ave-inspiring child and becoming a womb to the sacramental birth. . . .⁹⁰

But Theodore also emphasizes that baptism is a participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, and thus we receive together with Christ immortal life. This is brought about by the Holy Spirit, otherwise known as the Spirit of regeneration.⁹¹ Having now been crucified with Christ in baptism, sinful passions and desires can have no place in us for we have migrated into the future life through the regeneration of the Spirit.⁹² In his commentary on Titus 3:5 Theodore adds little more to this than to emphasize that God has renewed us by the power of the Holy Spirit through the figure of the washing (per formam lavacri).⁹³

In John Chrysostom (c.344-407 A.D.) we again see a leaning towards the ex opere operato doctrine. That he looks upon baptism simply as the power which changes man from a life of the flesh to a life of the Spirit is manifest in all his writings. In his Eight Baptismal Lectures he says that Christ first had to cleanse and sanctify the Church in order to present it to Himself as a glorious bride. So He sanctified

⁹⁰Instruction to Candidates for Baptism, Part 2, Sermon 4, Whitaker, p. 40.

⁹¹Theodori Episcopi Mopsuesteni Epistolas B. Pauli Commentarii: The Latin Version with the Greek Fragments, with an Introduction, Notes and Indices, edited by H. B. Swete (Cambridge: University Press, 1880-92), I, 30, 34, 59.

⁹²Ibid., I, 102.

⁹³Ibid., II, 253.

it by shedding His blood upon the cross and He cleanses it through the regeneration of washing (διὰ τῆς τοῦ λουτροῦ ἀναγεννήσεως).⁹⁴ The Church is actually formed "through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit," through baptism and the Lord's Supper symbolized in the water and blood which came forth from the body of Christ on the cross.⁹⁵ Chrysostom warns against falling back into sin because there is no second "washing of regeneration" through which forgiveness of sins can be obtained, and therefore there can be no second forgiveness. He certainly looks upon baptism as appropriating the forgiveness earned by Christ on the cross to the person baptized but he views it as a forgiveness of past sins only.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, that is not all which baptism does. Children, even though they are without sin, says Chrysostom, are to be baptized so that they might receive holiness, righteousness, sonship, inheritance, brotherhood, and become members of Christ and dwelling-places of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁷ Man dies as the tyranny of sin condemns him but he rises again "through the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit," hence the fleshly life is

⁹⁴ I Catechese 17, Huit Catecheses Baptismales Inedites, Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction et Notes de Antione Wenger (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, c.1958), pp. 117, 118.

⁹⁵ III Catechese 17; ibid., p. 161.

⁹⁶ III Catechese 23; ibid., p. 164.

⁹⁷ III Catechese 6; ibid., p. 154.

destroyed and the person baptized begins a new life with its roots in heaven and with Christ as its author.⁹⁸ The presence of the Holy Spirit, of course, gives the power to baptism and is the generating power for the new life. Man can reject the Holy Spirit and so cover himself once again with sin. There is a tendency here to look upon baptism as regenerative in a magical way.

Hilary of Poitiers (c.315-67 A.D.) really adds nothing new to the conversation on baptismal regeneration. He, too, teaches that the Holy Spirit comes to man through baptism and through Him the baptized person is renewed. He sometimes calls baptism simply "regeneration" as when he refers to the baptismal creed as the "creed of my regeneration."⁹⁹ The regeneration receives its meaning in the death and resurrection of Christ. "The regeneration of baptism," he says, "has the force of the resurrection."¹⁰⁰

The Apostolic Constitutions, written about this time (c.368 A.D.), also follow along in the same vein. Baptism is simply called τὸ λουτρὸν τῆς παλιγγενεσίας and its symbolism of death and resurrection together with Christ, the

⁹⁸Homily XI on 2 Corinthians 5:11, A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, Anterior to the Division of East and West (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1848), XXVII, 138.

⁹⁹De Trinitate XII:57, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, IX, 233.

¹⁰⁰De Trinitate IX:9, ibid., IX, 158.

putting on of immortality and the new life are again emphasized.¹⁰¹

Ambrose of Milan, writing near the end of the fourth century, gives us a more complete picture of the doctrine of baptism at this stage. Here again we see a leaning towards the magical concept of baptism. The emphasis is on the power of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament. Ambrose knows baptism mainly as the lavacrum regenerationis, a term which he uses continually, and it is the working of the Holy Spirit which makes it a washing of regeneration. Although there is no baptism without both elements, the water and the Spirit, there must be a distinction between their functions--the water is useful as a symbol of cleansing and the Holy Spirit renews. Thus they both bear testimony to the regeneration which takes place--the washing visibly and the Spirit invisibly. Commenting on 1 John 5:8 Ambrose writes:

Spiritus mentem renovat, aqua proficit ad lavacrum, sanguis spectat ad pretium. Spiritus enim nos per adoptionem filios Dei fecit, sacri fonti unda nos abluit, sanguis Domini nos redemit.¹⁰²

Further commenting on this text in his De Mysteriis he states quite clearly that there is no sacrament of baptism if one of these three witnesses is excluded. "Quid est enim," he says,

¹⁰¹Apostolic Constitutions VI:xxxix:4 and VII:vi:6, ΣΥΝΟΔΙΚΗ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣ ΚΑΤΕΡΣΙΝ, II, 134, 145.

¹⁰²De Spiritu Sancto III:x:68, Sancti Ambrosii, Mediolanensis Episcopi, Omnia Quae Extant Opera (Parisiis: Apud Paul Mellior, Bibliopolam, 1842), VI, 406.

"aqua sine cruce Christi? Elementum commune, sine ullo sacramenti effectu."¹⁰³ However, the Holy Spirit is the power working through the element of water giving new birth on the basis of the atoning work of Christ. Man has as little to do with this new birth as he did with his former birth into this world. Indeed, Ambrose appears to regard the baptismal font as a symbol of the womb with the Holy Spirit conceiving the new birth in it as He did the birth of Christ in Mary's womb.¹⁰⁴ The new birth is explained as being a resurrection from spiritual death by which the mind is renewed and man's wisdom is God-directed.¹⁰⁵ By this birth he becomes an heir of grace receiving the forgiveness of sins and laying hold of eternal life.¹⁰⁶ Elsewhere this forgiveness of sins is spoken of as coming per lavacri regenerationem from our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁷ Ambrose also points out that a sanctified life should follow on from one's baptism. As the waters in creation brought forth living creatures, so the waters of baptism regenerate man to grace; as the fish in the sea is

¹⁰³De Mysteriis I:iv:20, ibid., VII, 9.

¹⁰⁴Gilbert Cope, Symbolism in the Bible and the Church (London: SCM Press Ltd., c.1959), pp. 102, 103.

¹⁰⁵De Sacramentis III:i:1,2; Omnia Quae Extant Opera, VII, 47, 48, and De Paenitentia II:ii:8; ibid., VII, 138.

¹⁰⁶Enarratio in Psalmum XXXVI:lxiii, ibid., III, 210; De Spiritu Sancto III:x:64, ibid., VI, 405; De Sacramentis II:viii:24, ibid., VII, 45.

¹⁰⁷Expositio Evangelii Secundum Lucam IV:54, ibid., V, 143.

not overcome by the waves and the storms, so the person baptized should not be overcome by the waves and the storms of this life but should rise above them and prove himself to be an heir of grace.¹⁰⁸ He should no longer walk in the flesh but in the Spirit for, having been sanctified through the washing of regeneration, he can now cast out the old man with his lusts and put on the new man created according to Christ.¹⁰⁹ Ambrose reminds those baptized that they have entered the regenerationis sacramentum and there have renounced the devil and all his works, the world and all its luxury and pleasure.¹¹⁰ However, this sanctification is given so little consideration in the works of Ambrose that it gives one the impression that grace has been given mechanically, and the remission of sins and adoption result whether a true response follows or not. Faith is not even mentioned in connection with baptism, so unimportant did it seem to Ambrose in the discussion of baptismal regeneration.

Aurelius Augustine (354-430 A.D.), one of the greatest theologians of the Early Church, proved to be the last great churchman of this era. His doctrine on baptism is clearly defined with Titus 3:5 and its terminology taking first place in its expression. For baptism is a regeneration through

¹⁰⁸ De Sacramentis III:1:3, ibid., VII, 48.

¹⁰⁹ Expositio Evangelii Secundum Lucam VII:192, ibid., V, 324.

¹¹⁰ De Mysteriis I:11:5, ibid., VII, 4.

which man is saved according to the grace and mercy of God. Man cannot be saved unless he receives this washing of regeneration.¹¹¹ But salvation through baptism is not accomplished simply through the sacramental act for salvation yet remains in the future. To express this Augustine always follows up a quotation of Titus 3:5 with a quotation of Romans 8:24,25, emphasizing that the salvation granted in baptism is still in the realm of hope. We are still "groaning within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of the body."¹¹² Fitting into all this is the fact that Augustine believes that the power of baptism is primarily a washing away of inherited and past sins:

The salvation of man is effected in baptism because whatever sin he has derived from his parents is remitted, or whatever, moreover, he himself has sinned on his own account before baptism; but his salvation will hereafter be such that he cannot sin at all.¹¹³

The inherited sinful desire in man remains even after baptism but the Holy Spirit is received in the sacrament to fight against the flesh and to lead man to seek daily forgiveness.

¹¹¹De Peccatorum Meritis et Remissione I:34, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: First Series, edited by Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1887), V, 28.

¹¹²Cf. ibid. and Tractatus In Johannis Evangelium LXXXVI:1, in Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina (Turnholt: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1954ff.), XXXVI, 541; et al.

¹¹³A Treatise Against Two Letters of the Pelagians III:5, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: First Series, V, 404.

and thus remain unspotted.¹¹⁴ A person can put off the old man and put on the new according to 2 Corinthians 4:16 only when the "absolute and perfect change" has been made in him through the "washing of regeneration."¹¹⁵ It can easily be seen how Augustine was trying to satisfy two emerging doctrines of the Church--the growing stress on baptism as a saving rite of the Church and the parallel stress on penitence as a daily discipline of the Christian. However, he was quick to point out that man's salvation is not dependent upon his penitential life but solely upon God's free grace given in baptism. Here he leans towards the later Roman doctrine of gratia infusa, the idea of indwelling grace infused into the person through baptism thus enabling him to live righteously. But Augustine's emphasis at this time was not upon the mediation factor of baptism (this was later stressed by some to the detriment of the doctrine) but upon the fact that God in Christ does act not because of any merit in us but purely out of mercy and love for us. He places the emphasis on the first part of Titus 3:5: "He saved us, not because of deeds done in righteousness by us, but in virtue of His mercy. . . ."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴In Psalmum CXVIII Enarratio, Sermo XIX:7 in Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina, XL, 1729.

¹¹⁵De Peccatorum Meritis et Remissione II:9; A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: First Series, V, 48.

¹¹⁶Cf. In Psalmum CXII Enarratio, Sermo Ad Populum 6 in Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina, XL, 1633; and Enarratio II In Psalmum XVIII:2, ibid., XXXVIII, 106.

However, even on the person who rejects his faith after having been baptized, the sacrament does leave its mark:

The soul of an apostate, which was once similarly wedded unto Christ and now separates itself from Him, does not, in spite of its loss of faith, lose the sacrament of faith, which it has received in the waters of regeneration.¹¹⁷

Thus the connection of faith to baptism also is relatively unimportant. Sponsors of a child presented for baptism can declare: "He believes," because

an infant, although he is not yet a believer in the sense of having that faith which includes the consenting will of those who exercise it, nevertheless becomes a believer through the sacrament of that faith.¹¹⁸

Infants need the washing away of original sin through the washing of regeneration as much as anyone else does, says Augustine,¹¹⁹ and they also need the grace imparted thereby that they may later on move into the conscious possession of the forgiveness of sins:

In baptized infants, the sacrament of regeneration comes first, and if they shall preserve Christian piety, conversion will follow in the heart, the sign of which preceded in the body.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Sermo 56:12 quoted by Joseph B. Bernadin, "St. Augustine as Pastor," A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine, edited by Roy W. Battenhouse (New York: Oxford University Press, c.1955), p. 61.

¹¹⁸ Epistle 98 quoted by A. W. Argyle in Christian Baptism: A Fresh Attempt to Understand the Rite in Terms of Scripture, History, and Theology, edited by A. Gilmore (London: Lutterworth Press, c.1959), p. 216.

¹¹⁹ On Marriage and Concubiscence I:1 in A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: First Series, V, 263-64.

¹²⁰ De Baptismo I:v:24, The Church of Scotland, p. 35.

Augustine's whole doctrine is centred around Titus 3:5 and his idea of baptismal regeneration is based on this text--it is first and foremost the saving act of God done according to His free grace and mercy. His saving act operates by washing away all inherited and past sins and by imparting God's grace, a "quality" which gives strength and power to the baptized person for his future life. Regeneration is looked upon more as a process which progresses until it is completed in the resurrection when salvation moves from the realm of hope into the realm of fulfilment. Where does Christ fit into this whole doctrine of baptismal regeneration? It is true that Augustine does not mention Christ here very often. He sees baptism more as a ritual act, a means of God's grace dispensed by the Church rather than a direct divine bestowal of the saving work of Christ to the individual. Yet in his argument against rebaptism he speaks of Christ being the real minister of the sacrament when it is carried out according to His command.

Throughout this period we have seen the added stress which has been given to baptismal regeneration, but in the whole process Christ has tended to disappear as the inherent power of the water or the indwelling power of the Spirit have been emphasized. Titus 3:5 has remained one of the foremost baptismal texts yet has not often clearly been understood. The Church, too, since Cyprian has become more authoritative as the power behind the sacraments to the further detriment

of the doctrine. Although there are sometimes some very clear biblical insights given, the general picture has been of a move away from the practice and understanding of baptismal regeneration in New Testament times to a degenerative ecclesiasticism.

Interpretation from the Time of Augustine to the Beginning of the Reformation

After Augustine we see a general decline in theological literature. For the next eight centuries there are no great polemics or apologies or even books of instruction. The main sources for current teaching in the Church becomes the liturgies and associated writings and, later in and to a lesser extent, the writings of the schoolmen. This decline may be attributed to a number of reasons, such as the centralization of authority in the Church and the barbarian invasions. But yet the decline was not only in the amount of literature produced but also in the very doctrines. Whenever the Church becomes pre-occupied with its liturgy and form there is usually a decline in doctrinal understanding.

In the earlier stages, of course, this doctrinal decline is not evident. For instance, in the Leonine Sacramentary, written probably in the fourth or fifth century, no argument can be raised against the prayer for the blessing of the font, for the water is not understood to take on any magical significance:

We pray thy holy glory that thy hand may be laid upon this water that thou mayest cleanse and purify the lesser man who shall be baptized therefrom; and that he putting aside all that is deathly, may be reborn and brought to life again through the new man reborn in Jesus Christ, with whom thou livest and reignest in the unity of the Holy Spirit, unto the ages of ages.¹²¹

But this clarity is not found in the later Gallican sacramentary, the Missale Gothicum, dated about 700. In the invocation before baptism God is asked to bless "this creature of water," to descend upon it, and pour down upon it His Holy Spirit. The "creature of water" is also exorcised together with all the armies of the devil so that the font may truly be a lavacrum Baptismi regenerationis in remissione omnium peccatorum.¹²²

Turning to the Eastern Church at this time we find the writings of John of Damascus, born before 700, and still very conservative. In baptism, he says, man takes on the image of the death of Christ. Through prayer and invocation the Holy Spirit comes nigh unto the water thus making it possible for one to be born again of water and of the Spirit. The Spirit renews our spirit and the water cleanses our body from sin and delivers it from corruption by the grace of the Holy Spirit. But whereas remission of sins is granted alike to all

¹²¹Whitaker, p. 144.

¹²²Seccio II, Ordo I, Joseph Aloysius Assemanus, Codex Liturgicus Ecclesiae Universae in quo Continentur Libri Rituales, Missales, Pontificales, Officia, Dypticha, etc. Ecclesiarum Occidentis et Orientis nunc Primum Prodit, 1749, editio iterata ad editionis principis exemplum ab Huberto Welter (Parisiis & Lipsiae: n.p., 1902), II, 35.

in baptism, measures of the grace of the Spirit differ according to individual faith and previous purification. Thus the level of regeneration in every person may differ, yet all receive the first fruits of the Spirit in baptism. This second birth is "the beginning and seal and security, and illumination of another life." Those who come forward to baptism deceitfully receive no benefit but rather condemnation.¹²³

For Christians living in France and Western Europe around the eighth century and baptized according to the Gelasian Sacramentary, it must have been rather confusing to know just where their new life and salvation came from, for the power of baptism is not only attributed to water but also to the salt given to the catechumens and to the oil for anointing. In exercising the salt the priest prays:

Therefore we ask thee, O Lord our God, that in the name of the Trinity this creature of salt may be a saving sacrament to drive away the enemy.¹²⁴

In blessing the oil he says:

We pray thee O Lord that to those who shall come to the laver of blessed rebirth thou wouldest grant cleansing of mind and body by the working of this creature [oil]: so that every remnant of the enemy spirits which may cling to them may at the touch of this sanctified oil

¹²³De Fide Orthodoxa IV:9, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series, translated into English with Prolegomena and Explanatory Notes (Oxford: James Parker and Company, 1899), IX, 78-79.

¹²⁴The Gelasian Sacramentary I:31, Whitaker, p. 160.

depart. . . . May this unction which we prepare avail unto salvation, which through the birth of a heavenly generation they are to attain in the sacrament of baptism.¹²⁵

Further on in the prayer the priest asks God to infuse the oil with the power of the Holy Spirit that it may be the "chrism of salvation."¹²⁶ Nevertheless, it is frequently mentioned also that the baptismal water is the washing of regeneration unto the remission of sins. In the consecration of the font the priest says:

May the font be alive, the water regenerating, the wave purifying, so that all who shall be washed in this saving laver by the operation of the Holy Spirit within them may be brought to the mercy of perfect cleansing.¹²⁷

Further on in the consecration the medieval idea of power in the water itself comes to the fore:

May the power of thy Holy Spirit descend into all the water of this font and make the whole substance of this water fruitful with regenerating power.¹²⁸

The whole baptismal liturgy, sometimes using the terminology of Titus 3:5 and sometimes of John 3:5, is long and repetitious. The idea of the new birth is very strong throughout and often borders on the magical. The whole process of regeneration is described very graphically as the Church being pregnant and labouring in her worship to bring

¹²⁵The Gelasian Sacramentary I:40, ibid., pp. 170-71.

¹²⁶Ibid., p. 172.

¹²⁷The Gelasian Sacramentary I:44, ibid., p. 177.

¹²⁸Ibid., pp. 199-200.

forth new lives subject to Christian law, reborn in the washing of baptism and receiving the gift of infancy from Christ.¹²⁹ The number of exorcisms illustrates also that regeneration was believed to be first and foremost a casting off of the powers of the devils and then putting on of a Christian life and virtues through baptism. All this is a far cry from the baptism of the Early Church.

Similar in form and tone but with fewer exorcisms and blessings is the Bobbio Missal, dated about 700. There is, of course, the exorcism of the creature of the water to root out from it all powers of the adversary that it may be a fount of water giving health unto eternal life. Here again, the water is believed to take on a special power of its own being wonderfully effected by the invisible power of God, so that even "the nature of the water should be endowed with sanctifying power." The congregation bringing infants for baptism are also reminded that God has given power to water for regeneration since creation when the Spirit moved upon the waters, and then with the outpouring of the Flood, with the coming forth of water from the rock during the Wilderness sojourn, with the changing of water into wine, with the coming forth of water from Christ's side, and now in baptism.¹³⁰ Here too baptism is often referred to as a "washing of

¹²⁹The Gelasian Sacramentary I:34, ibid., p. 164.

¹³⁰Whitaker, pp. 199-200.

regeneration" without any further reference to Titus 3:5 or its context. The regenerating power is clearly found in the baptismal water which is made powerful by God's Spirit.

The Stowe Missal, written in Ireland about 800 A.D., bears much that is identical with the Gelasian Sacramentary and the Bobbio Missal but perhaps emphasizes more the power inherent in the water through the working of the Holy Spirit. The officiant prays:

Let the Holy Spirit by the hidden admixture of his light give fecundity to this water prepared for man's regeneration, so that, sanctification being conceived therein, there may come forth from the unspotted womb of the divine font a heavenly offspring, reborn unto a new creature: that grace may be a mother to people of every age and sex, who are brought forth into a common infancy.¹³¹

This concept continues right through a long prayer, the petition being repeated a number of times that the Holy Spirit make the whole substance of the water "fruitful with regenerating power." This is undoubtedly a heightening of the ex opere operato error.

Much more conservative in its doctrine is the Armenian Rite found in a manuscript dating from the ninth century. The furthest this rite goes in regard to baptismal regeneration is to call the sacrament the "font of regeneration;" or "washing of regeneration" and to pray that the baptismal water may be a

means to the remission of sins, to reception of the Holy Spirit, to adoption as a son of the heavenly

¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 208-09.

Father in heaven, and to inheriting of thy kingdom of heaven.¹³²

Like so many of these baptismal rites during this period the Liber Ordinum, used in Spain and known through a manuscript dated at 1052 A.D., portrays the rite of baptism as a sacrament of the Church somewhat divorced from the saving work of Christ. The whole emphasis is on the power which God sends upon the water through His Holy Spirit, thus allowing regeneration to take place in those who wash in the water. In one of the exorcisms spoken by the priest after he has blown on the font three times and has turned to face the West, words are addressed to the water itself:

O creature of water, I call upon thee, through God who is God of all, that thou refuse not to impart thy lively motion and know that thou hast a service to perform in which we seek to please God. Purge out from thyself the whole communion of demons, the whole society of iniquity, thou that are fitted for the Lord's use . . . so that having received the grace of sanctification thou mayest restore in innocence to God . . . those whom thou didst receive in their sins.¹³³

All this, of course, would substantiate the popular notion of that time that the material world was full of spiritual forces contending against each other and that the rite of baptism is some sort of magical regeneration in which the evil spirits are overcome by the good spirits in the water which has been blessed by God. Needless to say, the idea that in baptism the saving work of Christ is personally

¹³² Ibid., p. 56.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 109.

appropriated by God to the individual finds no real place here.

There are many other baptismal orders dating from this period, such as the Byzantine Rite and the Ambrosian Manual, but these add nothing further to the discussion except to substantiate what has already been said about growth in liturgical form and magical concept, and the consequent lessening of the importance of Christ in the sacrament.

During this period of liturgical emphasis and partly as a reaction to it there arose the beginnings of a new form of theological activity known as scholasticism. Its main objective was to ascertain the relationship of faith and reason. Scholasticism reached its highest point with Thomas Aquinas (1224-74) and through him has had a lasting influence on the Roman Church. In his Summa Theologica he sees baptism as a sacrament of regeneration through which God, the principal cause, confers grace. Baptism thus becomes the instrumental cause of grace, God's instrument for regeneration as Paul calls it in Titus 3:5.¹³⁴ However, in Aquinas's scholastic argumentation this divine grace is degraded to a human level where it becomes almost mechanical and is regarded as a power and quality detachable from the work of God in Christ. Grace becomes a quality contained in the sacrament

¹³⁴ Summa Theologica III:62:1, St. Thomae Aquinatis, Summa Theologiae De Rubais, Billuart, P. Faucher O.P. et Aliorum Notis Selectis Ornata Cum Textu ex Recensione Leonina, Pars IIIa et Supplementum (Romae: Marietti Editori Ltd., c.1952), p. 380.

which is infused into the person in baptism almost as a medicine is administered to a sick person. Thus he speaks of grace:

Much more, therefore, does He infuse into those whom He moves towards the acquisition of supernatural good certain supernatural forms or qualities whereby they may be moved by Him sweetly and promptly to acquire eternal good. Hence the gift of grace is a quality.¹³⁵

As Augustine spoke of the indelible character of baptism, so did Thomas Aquinas, but he gave it deeper meaning interpreting it as a regeneration through the impregnation of grace. After receiving this sacrament a person could lose his justifying grace but not the effect of grace.¹³⁶ In baptism Christ takes away the defects of the person such as the guilt of original and actual sin and the liability to the punishment of hell. The defects of the nature, however, such as pain and suffering and finally the death of the body are removed only in the general resurrection.¹³⁷ Here in the theology of Aquinas we have the laying down in its final form of the ex opere operato doctrine--that the sacrament contains and effects grace of itself and is not dependent upon the faith of either the minister or the recipient. This can imply an

¹³⁵Summa Theologica II:I:110:2, Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas, edited and annotated with an introduction by Anton C. Pegis (New York: Random House, c.1945), II, 999.

¹³⁶The Church of Scotland, Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism: May 1952 (Edinburgh: William Blackwell & Sons Ltd., 1957), p. 14.

¹³⁷Ibid.

impersonal mechanical operation as it was later understood by many, but Aquinas's main concern was to keep clear the objectivity of the baptismal grace. He also believed that faith was necessary in order to receive the blessing of baptism and to continue in its grace.¹³⁸ Baptismal regeneration, therefore, at the hands of Aquinas contains the idea of a cleansing of the person from sin and its final consequences, the depositing of the power or quality of grace in the soul which leaves its indelible character upon the person baptized. This quite unbiblical concept of sacramental grace was hinted at already by Tertullian with his idea of a semi-physical Spirit being grafted into the soul through baptism.

The Roman Catholic Church has since followed Thomas Aquinas's teachings and terminology but perhaps, especially after the Reformation, with greater emphasis on the sanctification and renewal which should follow baptism. This is seen already at the Council of Trent where the justification of the sinner is described as both the remission of sins and the sanctification and renewal of the inward man through the voluntary reception of the grace and gifts of God. There, baptism, described as "the sacrament of faith without which no man was ever justified," is called the instrumental cause of justification; whereas the glory of God and of Christ and

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

life everlasting is the final cause, the merciful God the efficient cause, Christ by His saving work the meritorious cause, and the justice of God by which He makes man just the single formal cause.¹³⁹ It is interesting to note that many of the references to baptism even here follow in the traditional phrase--as the lavacrum regenerationis. The Roman Catholic Church today commonly uses Titus 3:5 to express that baptism does regenerate man and ensure salvation for him. This regeneration is explained as taking place "through the infusion of habitual grace, of virtues, and of gifts."¹⁴⁰ It not only produces new life but kills sin, creates a new relationship towards God, makes men into the children of God, and incorporates them into the Church.¹⁴¹ The water of baptism is no longer ordinary water but it is "raised by the work of the Holy Spirit to the dignity of an instrumental cause of our regeneration."¹⁴² On the basis of the particles of John 3:5 and 2 Timothy 1:6, ex and per, grace is explained as being conferred from and through the sacraments signifying that

¹³⁹Session VI:7, H. J. Schroeder, Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent: Original Text with English Translation (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., c.1941), p. 33.

¹⁴⁰Ad. Tanqueray, A Manual of Dogmatic Theology, translated by John J. Byrnes (New York: Desclee Company, 1959), II, 221.

¹⁴¹John P. Murphy, "The Sacrament of Baptism," The Teaching of the Catholic Church: A Summary of Catholic Doctrine, arranged and edited by George D. Smith (New York: The Macmillan Company, c.1948), II, 767-68.

¹⁴²Ibid., II, 770.

that grace is produced by the sacraments themselves or ex opere operato. Thus the sacraments are the instrumental causes of grace.¹⁴³ Elsewhere they are described as

the physical cause of grace, in as much as they confer grace from the influence of God, and hence they are, so to speak, canals through which grace passes physically and really into our soul.¹⁴⁴

However, as with Aquinas, this grace is only justifying grace as long as no hindrance such as mortal sin is put in its way. Even then an "indelible character" remains which always makes it possible for the justifying grace to be recovered through other sacraments.¹⁴⁵

Here in this chapter we have seen baptismal regeneration expounded objectively as the gift from God of His atonement and reconciliation through Christ to the sinner and given to him through the means of the sacrament of baptism; we have seen it expounded as incorporation into Christ through baptism, as the working of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the water; we have seen it expounded as a regenerating power inherent in the water which in an almost magical way cleanses man of his sin and creates in him new life. We have seen how errors have gradually developed in this doctrine from false emphases and from a greater leaning on tradition than on Holy Scripture culminating in the complex systematic

¹⁴³Tanqueray, II, 197.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., II, 198.

¹⁴⁵The Church of Scotland, Interim Report, 1957, pp. 16-17.

theology of the schoolmen. We have seen how these errors have persisted even to the present day in the Roman Catholic Church in spite of the Counter Reformation. Right through this period, however, Titus 3:5 has remained as one of the principal proof-texts for baptismal regeneration, although it has been used to support the various opposing views propounded.

CHAPTER III

THE TRADITIONAL LUTHERAN INTERPRETATION

With the Roman Catholic Church getting further and further away from the biblical basis and becoming more entrenched in its own tradition, the light of the Gospel had been dimmed considerably and the life of the Church had almost been strangled, especially during the scholastic period before the Reformation. In fact, it was the deadness of scholasticism which helped considerably to bring on the Lutheran Reformation and which had before Luther caused men who were seeking life in the Church and were being frustrated by its barren theology, to rise up and voice their protest and seek reform. Very often these early reformers did not succeed because they desired to match one extreme against another. For in combating the errors of the Roman Church they would sometimes offer a position too much to the other extreme. This is often seen in their attitudes to the sacraments. Luther, however, was careful to see that he did not react in this way but tried to keep to a position which was not extreme in any way but firmly entrenched in the Word of God. Thus he sought to retain whatever could be retained in accord with God's Word. This attitude of moderation and the three basic principles of the Reformation--sola scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide--became the basis for his understanding of the doctrine of baptism and have always remained the basis

for the Lutheran Church. Nevertheless, the middle way between the Scylla of Roman Catholicism and the Charybdis of Reformed views is a very narrow course and some Lutheran theologians have at times deviated too much either to the right or to the left. Mention will be made of these later.

The Interpretation of Martin Luther

With the joyful discovery of the Gospel, with its clarity and the freedom it breeds, Luther soon became contemptuous of the scholastics and their barren Aristotelian philosophy and advised all to despise these theologians who, he said,

at their best write only of the "matter" and "form" of the sacraments; that is, they treat of the dead and death-dealing letter of the sacraments, but leave untouched the spirit, life, and use, that is, the truth of the divine promise and our faith.¹

In comparison with the scholastics in the presentation of the doctrine of baptism, therefore, Luther is wonderfully lucid. The basic Reformation principles of sola scriptura, sola gratia, and sola fide become the basic emphases in his treatment of baptismal regeneration. Consequently, Titus 3:5 is no longer as prominent in his writings as it was in some of the Church Fathers (although he does quote it often) and regeneration becomes essentially justification in the wider sense. But in order to understand this fully we must look

¹"The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," Luther's Works, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, and Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1955--), XXXVI, 62.

more closely at his teaching on baptism.

With his emphasis on the Word of God, Luther at first tended to separate the Word from the sign in the sacrament and regard the Word as having greater power than the water which was merely the sign.² But he soon realized it was not as simple as that, that there could be no arbitrary separation of water and Word in baptism. The Word actually brought some new aspect to the water, sanctifying it and making it holy and divine. He now insisted that the connection between the water and the Word was so inseparable that there could be no division. Thus in his sermon on baptism in 1528 he could use the old terminology of the Fathers and say:

Don't look at the water and see that it is wet, but rather that it has with it the Word of God. It is a holy, living, heavenly blessed water because of the Word and command of God, which is holy.³

For this water can no longer be the simple water with which the maid waters the cow for through it is given salvation, forgiveness of sins, and redemption from death and the devil. Nevertheless, the water does not do this of itself but rather because the Word of God is connected with it "for as the Word, so the water becomes also."⁴ With the Word as the real core of the sacrament joined to the element, the sacrament

² Ibid., XXXVI, 44, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" was written in 1520.

³ "Ten Sermons on the Catechism," ibid., LI, 183.

⁴ Ibid., LI, 184-85.

truly becomes what Paul calls it in Titus 3:5, a "washing of regeneration."⁵

As a reaction against the false objectivity of the ex opere operato doctrine Luther at first tended to over-emphasize the role of faith. Thus in 1520 he wrote:

Their [the sacraments] whole efficacy, therefore, consists in faith itself, not in the doing of a work. Whoever believes in them, fulfils them, even if he should not do a single work. This is the origin of the saying: "Not the sacrament, but the faith of the sacrament, justifies" Thus it is not baptism that justifies or benefits, but it is faith in that word and promise to which baptism is added. This faith justifies, and fulfils that which baptism signifies.⁶

Writing against the Anabaptists in 1528, however, and throughout the rest of his life he was always sure to keep a proper balance between the sola gratia and the sola fide thus bringing a true objectivity to the sacrament. Faith, he taught, is still important but baptism can never be based on faith. For as long as the Word and command of God are present in baptism the baptism is valid even without faith, although it will not benefit anyone unless he receives it with faith in his heart.⁷ In all this Mark 16:16 appears as the most important baptismal proof-text for Luther. But he continually condemned the assertion of the Anabaptists that this text

⁵"Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4," ibid., XXII, 515.

⁶"The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," ibid., XXXVI, 65-66.

⁷"Concerning Rebaptism," ibid., XL, 252, et passim.

implies confession of faith before baptism. For no one can determine another's faith but, rather, it is a matter of every man's conscience to realize that if his baptism is to benefit him he must believe what God offers to him in it.⁸

Luther's contention was that on the basis of Mark 16:16 faith must be present in order to receive baptism but he did concede to the possibility that faith could be conferred in baptism⁹ or that faith could even appear ten years after baptism and thus complete the sacrament.¹⁰ Moreover, Luther held that God does not tie Himself to the sacrament although, in a sense, man is tied to it. For if a wicked minister were not to administer baptism in the name of the Lord yet the person being baptized believed the sacrament to be in the name of the Lord, then he would be truly baptized because of faith.¹¹ Similarly, if a person believed that he had been rightly baptized but yet, in actual fact, had never been brought to baptism, that person's faith would be sufficient for him for "all things are possible to him who believes."¹² So Luther held that faith is vitally important if baptism is to bring

⁸ Ibid., XL, 240-41

⁹ "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," ibid., XXXVI, 59.

¹⁰ "Concerning Rebaptism," ibid., XL, 246.

¹¹ "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," ibid., XXXVI, 63-64.

¹² "Concerning Rebaptism," ibid., XL, 260.

about regeneration.

With faith so important for baptismal regeneration in his theology and with his contention that the words of Jesus: "He who believes and is baptized" requires the presence of faith in baptism, Luther had to contend that infants, too, can believe. Some of the arguments he used to uphold this belief show a rather strange method of interpretation. For instance, he speaks of Psalm 72 which describes how the Jews shed the innocent blood of their children in offering them to idols and argues that they could only have been innocent if they had faith and the Spirit. Similarly he argues concerning the innocent children whom Herod murdered.¹³ Also strange is his contention that children must have faith if the kingdom of heaven belongs to them as Jesus says, or that John must have had faith already in his mother's womb.¹⁴ Yet Luther did not really regard these as final proofs of infant faith; the final word for him on the subject was that Christ has commanded baptism for all:

We have the command to offer the common gospel and the common baptism to everyone, and herein the children must be included. We plant and water, and leave the growth to God.¹⁵

He believed that as long as this command to baptize is fulfilled, God would see to it that faith was present. Thus

¹³ Ibid., XL, 242.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., XL, 258.

he could confidently assert:

Therefore it is our judgment that through the faith and prayer of the church young children are cleansed of unbelief and of the devil and are endowed with faith, and thus are baptized.¹⁶

Besides, so many men throughout history who had been baptized as infants have shown the fruits of their faith and baptism in their lives.¹⁷ This sufficed for Luther to attribute baptismal regeneration also to infants.

The regeneration and renewal which is brought about in baptism is defined by Luther in various ways. In his explanation of Titus 3:5 he defines the "washing of regeneration" as being a bath which does not merely wash the skin and cleanse the body but which reverses and changes man's whole nature so that the first birth of the flesh is destroyed with its inherited sin and condemnation and a new spiritual birth takes place in which man is given salvation and begins to live his life in Christ. "Renewal" is simply a clarification of the word "regeneration."¹⁸ The one who administers the "washing of regeneration" is Christ Himself who alone can cleanse man of the inner filth of the old sinful birth and evil conscience and give him forgiveness of sins and a good conscience.¹⁹ Regeneration is hinged on faith, for everyone

¹⁶"The Adoration of the Sacrament," *ibid.*, XXXVI, 301.

¹⁷"Ten Sermons on the Catechism," *ibid.*, LI, 186.

¹⁸Saemtliche Schriften, edited by John George Walch. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1904), XII, 139-140.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, XII, 536-537.

who believes that Christ was born, died, and rose from the dead for our sins is reborn; if he remains constant in this faith then a whole new life opens up before him. Luther says:

Then the Holy Spirit is there to baptize you, to strengthen and increase your faith, and to implant a new understanding in your heart. He also awakens in you holy and new thoughts and impulses, so that you begin to love God, refrain from all ungodly conduct, gladly do God's will, love your neighbour, and shun anger, hatred, and envy. Such works are performed by those who have been born anew through baptism in which the Holy Spirit is active, making new persons of them.²⁰

Of ourselves we could never become the children of God or even seek to live according to God's command and will but such is the power of Christ in our baptism that He brings this about through removing inherited sin and declaring us righteous before God. Thus declared innocent we are without sin and without death and so shall rise on the Last Day "more beautiful and pure than the sun, righteous in body and soul, and live to all eternity."²¹ But it must not be understood from this that baptismal regeneration means a total removal of all sin and the ability to sin. Man still has to fight against his old evil nature, but the point is that he can now fight against it with confidence knowing that God has come to his aid in his baptism and made a covenant with him. God not

²⁰"Sermons on the Gospel of St. John," Luther's Works, XXII, 286.

²¹"Sermon at the Baptism of Bernhard von Anhalt, 1540," ibid., LI, 323-324.

only forgives man his sins, that is, those sins are no longer imputed to him, but He also gives man His Holy Spirit in baptism so that he can slay sin more and more every day until the Day of Resurrection and thus fulfil his baptism. Therefore one should continually remember one's baptism and find comfort in it "that God has pledged himself to slay his sin for him and not to count it a cause for condemnation."²² This is why Christ has brought us into the Church, that we might remain always under the Physician's care. For, says Luther,

if the Holy Spirit is not ruling men, they become corrupt again; but the Holy Spirit must cleanse the wounds daily. Therefore this life is a hospital; the sin has really been forgiven, but it has not yet been healed.²³

So to summarize Luther's understanding of Titus 3:5 and his teaching of baptismal regeneration it must be said, first of all, that regeneration in baptism is a personal appropriation by God to the sinner of the atoning work of Christ received by faith. This means that the person baptized is forgiven his sins, receives eternal life, and is now accounted by God as one of His children and a member of His kingdom. Secondly, he receives in Christ a new Lord who guides and determines his life. Thirdly, he receives the gift of the Holy Spirit who leads him into righteousness of life,

²²"The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism," ibid., XXXV, 33-34

²³"The Last Sermon in Wittenberg, 1546," ibid., LI, 373.

overcoming sin more and more and thus becoming more like the righteousness which has been imputed to him. This all means that the regeneration and renewal which takes place in baptism is primarily not a change in man's essence but a change in his status and consequently in his outlook. Of course, a gradual change in man will take place as he lives in his baptism. But in baptism he does not automatically become an essentially "spiritual" person although he adopts a "spiritual" outlook.²⁴ Thus regeneration is purely what it claims to be--a new birth, a beginning of new life but not the new life itself. That must follow on after the regeneration just as life must follow on from a successful birth. Also, as man has no hand in his natural birth so he has no hand in his rebirth which is entirely the work of God, although this must be accepted in faith if it is to be personally appropriated and built upon. Thus regeneration is basically another way of putting the central doctrine of the Reformation--justification by grace through faith--in the realm of baptism.

Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions

In general the Lutheran Confessions carry on in the same strain as the teachings of Luther in his general writings.

²⁴Cf. Werner Jetter, Die Taufe beim jungen Luther: Eine Untersuchung ueber das Werden der reformatorischen Sakraments- und Taufanschauung, in Beitrage zur historischen Theologie (Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], c.1954), XVIII, 224-28.

This, of course, is to be expected as the Lutheran Confessions have been written partly by Luther himself, partly by his close associate, Philip Melancthon, and the final confession, the Formula of Concord, by a group of Lutheran theologians who based their writings largely on the previous confessions. But there are slight differences to which our attention will be drawn.

Luther, especially in the Small and Large Catechisms, gives prime emphasis to the centrality of the Word. It is not water which produces forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and grants eternal salvation, but the Word of God connected with it. Without the Word there is no baptism, but with the Word of God it is a gracious water of life and a "washing of regeneration in the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5).²⁵ Yet water and the Word cannot be separated but are intimately connected to make a sacrament which can now be called "Christ's baptism."²⁶ Thus with the Word the water of baptism "is no longer simply natural water but a divine, heavenly, holy, and blessed water."²⁷ Closely

²⁵Small Catechism, Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, (5th edition; Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1963), p. 516. Hereafter this edition will be referred to as BS, and the following abbreviations will be used for references to the Confessions: AC, Augsburg Confession; Apol, Apology of the Augsburg Confession; SA, Smalcald Articles; SC, Small Catechism; LC, Large Catechism; FC, Formula of Concord; Ep, Epitome and SD, Solida Declaratio of the Formula.

²⁶LC IV:22, BS, p. 695.

²⁷LC IV:17, BS, p. 694.

connected with this idea of the centrality of the Word is the inclusion of God's name in baptism. The fact that God uses His own name in this sacrament gives it the power of a guarantee that forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are, indeed, offered therein--"Denn Gott selbs sein Ehre hinansetzt, sein Kraft und Macht daran legt."²⁸ Word and name become almost synonymous. Thus:

Wo aber Gottes Name ist, da muss auch Leben und Seligkeit sein, dass es wohl ein goettlich, selig, fruchtbarlich und gnadenreich Wasser heisset. Denn durchs Wort kriegt sie die Kraft, dass sie ein "Bad der Wiedergeburt" ist, wie sie Paulus nennet an Titum am 3.²⁹

A further method used by Luther to indicate the objectivity of baptism and to make clear that the regenerating power of God is assuredly in baptism was to explain it as "Gottes eigen Werk." So he states:

Denn in Gottes Namen getauft werden, ist nicht von Menschen sondern von Gott selbs getauft werden; darumb ob es gleich durch des Menschen Hand geschicht, so ist es doch wahrhaftig Gottes eigen Werk, daraus ein iglicher selbs wohl schliessen kann, dass es viel hoeher ist denn kein Werk, von einem Menschen oder Heiligen getan.³⁰

This is not only a strong affirmation of the sola gratia but the most powerful assurance that Luther can give that God uses baptism to give the new birth to the sinner. And, as Luther is always quick to point out, this must be received by

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ LC IV:27, BS, p. 696.

³⁰ LC IV:10, BS, pp. 692-93.

the sinner in faith.³¹ Here again, Luther does not look upon baptismal regeneration as a moral transformation or a gradual process dependent upon the growth in faith of the baptized. Rather, he regarded it as a single momentary act by God in which God cleanses the baptized person with His forgiving grace and presents him with a new life. In other words, God personally appropriates to the sinner the whole life and work of Christ in baptism, and this is what Luther knows as baptismal regeneration. Regeneration is freedom from the shackles of the old life of sin and freedom to live the new life in Christ, brought about through the forgiveness of sins accepted in faith.³² Baptism, of course, not only announces new life but also produces and promotes it, as Luther points out,³³ but that is not regeneration but the sanctification which follows it.

Turning now to the part Melancthon played in the Lutheran Confessions we come to the rather brief statement on baptism in the Augsburg Confession. There³⁴ it is obvious that Melancthon desired to say as little as possible stating only that which could be agreed to readily by the Roman Church

³¹ LC IV:29, 36, BS, pp. 696, 698.

³² Friedrich Brunstaed, Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften (Guetersloh; C. Bertelsmann Verlag, c.1951), p. 153.

³³ LC IV:75, BS, p. 706.

³⁴ AC IX:1,2, BS, p. 63.

"De baptismo docent, quod sit necessarius ad salutem, quoque per baptismum offeratur gratis Dei." Melancthon also briefly stated here that children, too, are received into God's grace through baptism. Thus baptism certainly is spelled out as the means of regeneration. Moreover, already in Article II he has spoken of baptism as the means for being cleansed of the guilt of original sin and for regeneration.³⁵ But this does not fully describe regeneration. The fact that he does not mention faith in either of these baptismal references has led to some confusion even among Lutherans. Yet in another place when speaking of justification, Melancthon makes faith the basis for the reception of God's grace.³⁶ This seems to be the other side of the coin. Some, however, only find this contradictory that he should at one time speak of the grace of God being received through faith and at another time through baptism.³⁷

This confusion is carried on into the Apology. Here again in the article on baptism Melancthon does not mention faith but says that "Christ regenerates through Word and sacraments."³⁸ He says that baptism is necessary and efficacious

³⁵AC II:2, BS, p. 53.

³⁶AC IV:1,2, BS, p. 56.

³⁷

Cf. Walter Lohrmann, Glaube und Taufe in den Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche: Ein Beitrag zur theologischen Besinnung ueber die Tauffrage heute (Stuttgart: Calver verlag, c.1962), p. 60

³⁸Apol IX:2, BS, p. 247.

for salvation, also for little children, but he does not state what baptismal regeneration really entails. Elsewhere he speaks of regeneration as coming about through faith alone. Faith, he says in the article on justification, frees from death, brings forth new life in the heart, and is a work of the Holy Spirit; and this is conversion or regeneration. Here the nature of faith and the manner of regeneration amount to the same thing.³⁹ He goes on further:

Sed hoc defendimus, quod proprie ac vere ipsa fide propter Christum iusti reputemur, seu accepti Deo simus. Et quia iustificari significat ex iniustis iustos effici seu regenerari, significat et iustos pronuntiari seu reputari. Utroque enim modo loquitur scriptura. Ideo primum volumus hoc ostendere, quod sola fide ex iniusto iustum efficiat, hoc est, accipiat remissionem peccatorum.⁴⁰

And again: "Igitur sola fide iustificamur, intelligendo iustificationem, ex iniusto iustum effici seu regenerari."⁴¹ Further on in summarizing, Melanchthon again puts it tersely and says

quod sola fide consequimur remissionem peccatorum propter Christum, et quod sola fide iustificamur, hoc est, ex iniustis efficiamur seu regeneremur.⁴²

All this causes Lohrmann to speak of Melanchthon's Lehre von der doppelten Wiedergeburt.⁴³ He cannot see how regeneration

³⁹Apol IV:64-68, BS, p. 173.

⁴⁰Apol IV:72, BS, p. 174.

⁴¹Apol IV:78, BS, p. 175.

⁴²Apol IV:117, BS, p. 184.

⁴³Lohrmann, p. 60, 61.

through baptism and regeneration through faith alone can ever be reconciled because especially in infant baptism he finds it generally impossible to bring faith and the act of baptism together to a single point of time. The criticism is perhaps a valid one, for when is a man regenerated who is baptized as an infant yet only comes to faith as an adult? Is he regenerated in baptism or does he have to wait until he receives faith? Melancthon does not quite clear up this problem even when he says that by sola fide he is not ruling out the Word and the sacraments but only the claim of merit.⁴⁴ Nowhere does Melancthon make any attempt to bring the regeneration of faith and baptism together. Thus Lohrmann, who is more concerned about emphasizing the sola fide almost to the exclusion of the sola gratia, finds only contradiction and error. "Die Lehre vom doppelten Heilsweg," he says, "ist keine Lehre, sondern eine Irrlehre."⁴⁵

The problem is still carried on in the Formula of Concord although the connection between baptism and faith is made clearer. However, no full statement is made on this sacrament as it was not a matter of controversy among Lutherans. Baptism is described as a "means" (Mittel) whereby God seals the adoption of sons and works regeneration.⁴⁶ Elsewhere

⁴⁴Apol IV:73, BS, p. 174. *SD II:65, BS, p. 697.*

⁴⁵Lohrmann, p. 61. *p. 282.*

⁴⁶*SD XII:31, BS, p. 1097.*

regeneration is spoken of as being brought about by the Holy Spirit who works through both the Word and the sacraments.⁴⁷ And here we see faith and baptism in a clearer relationship to each other: baptism is one of the means the Holy Spirit uses to bring about a new and godly life in man, or, in other words, to bring about regeneration and faith by which man can receive this regeneration. This makes the Holy Spirit fundamental to both regeneration and faith. Thus it is described in the Formula of Concord:

Wie dann zum dritten die Heilige Schrift die Bekehrung, den Glauben an Christum, die Wiedergeburt, Erneuerung und alles, was zu derselbigen wirklichen Anfang und Vollziehung gehoert . . . in solidum, das ist, ganz und gar, allein der goettlichen Wirkung und dem Heiligen Geist zuschreibt, wie auch die Apologia sagt . . . neu geboren werden, inwendig ander Herz, Sinn, und Mut bekommen, das wirkt alleine der Heilige Geist.⁴⁸

Thus the Holy Spirit begins the work of regeneration and renewal in man through baptism, and through baptism, the Lord's Supper and the Word creates and strengthens faith so man can co-operate in his new life and live more and more as a child of God.⁴⁹ Yet here the theologians definitely confine regeneration to baptism when they say:

Darumb ist ein grosser Unterscheid zwischen den getauften und ungetauften Menschen; denn weil nach der Lehre S. Pauli, Gal. 3., "alle die, so getauft sind, Christum angezogen" und also wahrhaftig wiedergeboren, haben sie

⁴⁷Epit II:13, BS, p. 779; SD II:65, BS, p. 897.

⁴⁸SD II:25, 26, BS, p. 882.

⁴⁹SD II:65, 68, BS, pp. 898-99.

nun arbitrium liberatum, das ist, wie Christus sagt, "sie seind wiederumb frei gemacht," der Ursach denn sie nicht allein das Wort hoeren, sondern auch demselben, wiewohl in grosser Schwachheit, Beifall tun und annehmen koennen.⁵⁰

Is this to say that the unbaptized person only hears the Word of God but cannot assent to it or accept it? This, then, would be a contradiction of their former statement that the Holy Spirit works also through the Word. Here again we face the same problem as in the Apology: At what stage does regeneration take place--at baptism or at conversion or both? Or are regeneration and conversion to be regarded as synonymous terms for an event which takes place at baptism? This of course, again raises the question as to what is meant by the term regeneration. Generally with Luther and Melancthon it meant God's act of imputing righteousness to the sinner or being justified by grace through faith, but here in the Formula of Concord with its multiple authorship there is sometimes a confusing of justification and sanctification in the definition. Hence the theologians felt the need for defining the term as being rightly used either way--either as justification as St. Paul used it in Titus 3:5 or as sanctification.⁵¹ Therefore, according to this it would not be wrong to speak of regeneration and conversion as being synonymous terms. In this sense, baptismal regeneration would inevitably mean conversion by baptism, that is, the Roman Catholic idea that grace is

⁵⁰SD II:67, BS, pp. 898-99.

⁵¹Epit III:8, BS, p. 782 and SD III:18-21, BS, pp. 920-21.

infused through the sacrament and thus salvation is automatic. Yet the Epitome clearly states that faith alone is the means and instrument by which in Christ we obtain the righteousness which avails before God.⁵² Therefore baptismal regeneration must be understood as regeneration in the narrow sense, that is, as objective justification whereby God through baptism appropriates to the sinner the whole atoning work of Christ and bestows the gift of His Holy Spirit to create and nurture faith in the sinner so that he can receive the righteousness of Christ unto himself and accept it as his own possession. Regeneration, then, certainly comes about at the moment of baptism, but whether faith comes at that moment or later on in life the Formula of Concord is not prepared to answer. The only way out of the dilemma is to say that when a baptized person does come to faith through the working of the Holy Spirit then he can look back on his baptism and be assured that the forgiveness of sins, adoption by God and eternal life earned for him by Christ are surely his own.

This is the answer which must be given also for Melancthon in the Apology and, indeed, for the whole of the Lutheran Confessions. That this was never clearly stated in the Confessions has led to two general misconceptions of the Lutheran doctrine of baptism and regeneration. On the one hand, the Roman Catholic idea has been held that salvation

⁵²Epit III:5, BS, p. 782.

comes about automatically through baptism, and on the other, that faith alone is the regenerating power with baptism understood as little more than a symbol. These errors are rejected by the Lutheran Reformers for whom "washing of regeneration" is the act of God appropriating His grace to the sinner and by His Holy Spirit inaugurating the new life.

Lutheran Interpretation Since the Reformation

The period of the Reformation was quickly followed by the period of Orthodoxy in the Lutheran Church in which the emphasis was placed strongly upon Church dogma. In this period the Orthodox theologians sought to crystallize and departmentalize the fluid and living theology of Luther. Thus much of its life was lost with this return to a sort of neo-scholasticism.

The orthodox theologians of this period were unanimous in agreeing that baptism is the washing of regeneration and that regeneration actually comes about through this sacrament. This was clearly stated by Jacob Andreae in his discussion with the Reformed Theologian Theodor Beza at Moempelgard in 1586.⁵³ There in the discussion of the significance of baptism he used the same argument Luther had used in the debate with Zwingli on the Lord's Supper to press home his

⁵³Quoted by Bengt Haeggglund, "Rechtfertigung-Wiedergeburt-Erneuerung in der nachreformatorischen Theologie," Kerygma und Dogma, V (October 1959), 321.

point that baptism really and truly IS the "washing of regeneration", it does not merely signify, figure, outline, or represent it:

Nulla hic figura, nulla metaphora, nulla significatio locum habet, de qua vos loquimini. Sed EST, EST, EST lavacrum regenerationis.

Only when baptism is understood in the Lutheran sense as effecting regeneration would it bear firm assurance to the sinner of his justification before God:

non . . . representandae sed efficiendae regenerationis causa instituta est, ne figuras et umbras, sed corpus et veritatem quaeramus et credamus.⁵⁴

Nor was baptism to be regarded simply as a declaratory act through which an "effective" regeneration would have to be accomplished but as effecting regeneration in itself or, rather, as working as an effective instrument of the Holy Spirit. But the work of the Holy Spirit is conditioned by the amount of resistance in man. Therefore regeneration may be regarded, according to some Orthodox men, as instantaneous in the case of infants but only successive in the case of adults. Thus David Hollaz expressed it:

The regeneration of infants is instantaneous, but the ordinary regeneration of adults is successive. In infants, as there is not an earnest and obstinate resistance, the grace of the Holy Spirit accompanying Baptism breaks and restrains their natural resistance that it may not impede regeneration; wherefore, their regeneration takes place instantaneously. In the regeneration of adults there are many difficulties to be removed with care, and illumination and instruction extended over a long time are to be afforded from the

⁵⁴ Ibid.

divine Word, until a full faith is enkindled in the mind.⁵⁵

So also John Quenstedt: "Regeneration is successive and increasing."⁵⁶ But this was understanding regeneration in a different way to Luther for whom regeneration was strictly objective--the act of God appropriating the work of Christ to the person being baptized. Here regeneration includes not only the act of justification and the gift of the Holy Spirit but also the working of the Holy Spirit in bringing about faith and sanctification. One of the earlier theologians of this period, Caspar Brochmann, tried to clarify the meaning of regeneration by saying:

Those who say that regeneration is instantaneous, seem to understand by it either justification or the conferring of the beginning of faith as to the first holy thought and pious desire.⁵⁷

Matthias Flacius also had endeavoured to keep sanctification separate from regeneration by making a distinction between the regeneratio and the renovatio in Titus 3:5. While both words are placed together as dependent on lavacrum in the Vulgate, Flacius changed it to "per lavacrum regenerationis et renovationem Spiritus sancti."⁵⁸ In this way Flacius

⁵⁵Quoted by Heinrich Schmid, The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, translated from German and Latin by Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs, (3rd edition; Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, c.1899), p. 464.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Haeggglund, p. 326.

desired to keep regeneration completely objective as the work of God imputing righteousness or new birth by which man becomes a child of God. Renewal, then, was for him the new life which followed on from the new birth.⁵⁹ John Gerhard later pursued this distinction in describing the various effects of baptism:

Following the apostle, Tit. 3:5, we reduce them all to these heads: that Baptism is the washing of regeneration, which embraces the gift of faith, the remission of sins, reception into the covenant of grace, adoption as the sons of God, the putting on of Christ, deliverance from the power of Satan and the possession of eternal life; and renewal, that is, the Holy Spirit is given to him, who begins to renew the intellect, the will, and all the powers of the soul, so that the lost image of God may begin to be restored in him, that the inner man may be renewed, that the old man may be put off, and the new man put on, that the Spirit may oppose the flesh and rule over it, so that sin may not obtain dominion in the body.⁶⁰

Behind all this discussion about the true definition of regeneration and the difficulty in separating it from sanctification is the problem of its relationship to faith. The Reformers taught that faith is essential for the reception of baptismal regeneration yet they also spoke of baptism as the means used by the Holy Spirit to create faith. Gerhard brings these two points together in discussing infant baptism. He says that for infants baptism is primarily the means of regeneration and purification from sin and, secondly, the seal of righteousness and the confirmation of faith. Then

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 326, 328.

⁶⁰Schmid, p. 545.

in the next breath he goes on to say that in baptism infants receive the first fruits of the Spirit and of faith.⁶¹ In other words, baptism is also for infants a "washing of regeneration," yet regeneration cannot take place without faith. Therefore baptism must produce faith. But Gerhard and the degmaticians had to confess that they did not know what kind of faith this way, although they were sure it was there. Chemnitz sought to explain it by saying that the actual operation of the Holy Spirit in the infant could be called faith.⁶² But one thing was clear to them--that as the Word cannot influence infants, then baptism is the only means of regeneration open to them. Therefore baptism certainly must have cleansed them from the contagion of original sin and truly regenerated them.⁶³ With regard to the baptism of adults the question was asked: Do adults who have already been regenerated by the Word need to undergo baptism, the washing of regeneration? The Orthodox theologians answered in the affirmative. Gerhard explained that for an adult believer baptism would then serve principally as a seal and testimony of the grace of God, sonship and eternal life and would also increase renewal and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 547.

⁶² Ibid., p. 550.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 546.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 547.

Matthew Hafenreffer pointed out that adult believers should not hesitate to be baptized, for

Baptism is truly to them the laver of regeneration, because it augments regeneration, wrought by the Word, by a wonderful addition; because, also, the sacramental act seals the regeneration of faith to absolute certainty.⁶⁵

Here again we come back to this important point that baptism not only has all the force and power of the Gospel in imparting to the sinner the whole saving work of Christ but it also is God's personal approach to the individual imparting His grace to each separately thus giving a blessed assurance and sealing the regeneration of faith to absolute certainty. This basically is baptismal regeneration. But the fact that it was not always so clearly defined by the dogmaticians has led to misunderstandings of baptismal regeneration in some Lutheran circles ever since. The first to follow the misunderstanding were the Pietists.

As a reaction against the dryness of systematized theology there followed on from the period of Orthodoxy the period of Pietism in which regeneration became the central concept of the Christian doctrine. But in order to connect it with the Christian life the Pietists gave it far more subjective meaning than had been done before. They now explained regeneration to be a real transformation in the person which made itself apparent by a living faith. For them

⁶⁵
Ibid.

there was no real separation between regeneration and the moral renewal which must follow faith.⁶⁶ This certainly took away the comfort and certainty of baptism and made salvation dependent upon one's own good works. Rationalism followed as a reaction to Pietism and the concept of baptismal regeneration almost disappeared. Liberalism followed and has remained in different forms to the present day. But there have also been reactions against Liberalism with a return to the Reformation and Post-Reformation theology, and these, too, have remained in various shades of conservatism.

Both liberal and conservative elements were apparent in the young Lutheran churches in North America during the 1850's. In 1855 the liberal element published a paper called Definite Platform, Doctrinal and Disciplinarian for Ev. Luth. District Synods, Constructed in Accordance with the Principles of General Synod. In this paper the Liberals condemned the Augsburg Confession for teaching, among other things, the "error" of baptismal regeneration. This Definite Platform was circulated by the General Synod but was rightly condemned by most district synods. Of baptismal regeneration it says:

By this designation is meant the doctrine that Baptism is necessarily and invariably attended by spiritual regeneration, and that such water Baptism is unconditionally essential to salvation. Regeneration in its proper sense of the term, consists in a radical change in our religious views--in our religious feelings, purposes, habits of action.⁶⁷

⁶⁶Haeggglund, p. 320.

⁶⁷Quoted by Charles P. Krauth, The Conservative Reform-

Quite clearly the writers of the Definite Platform did not know the Lutheran Confessions very well for the Confessions had never known such "baptismal regeneration," although by the brevity of the articles on baptism they had encouraged misunderstandings. The Definite Platform sounded more like a repudiation of Pietism which still influenced some groups within the General Synod. Nevertheless, this document had some good results in that it caused the different synods to examine the doctrine of baptismal regeneration as taught in Holy Scripture and also in the Lutheran Confessions. The general result was not only a rejection of the false concept of baptismal regeneration condemned in the Definite Platform but also of the Zwinglian concept of baptism supported by the Definite Platform. Thus baptismal regeneration is once again brought back to its rightful place as the middle road between two extremes. This is clearly brought out in one of the contending articles written at this time:

In the new birth, regeneration, strictly considered, sustains the same relation that generation does to the natural birth. It is the implanting of the seed of the new man within us In thus accepting the doctrine of regeneration and tracing it to, and from, the grace of God offered unto man in holy Baptism, and accepted and appropriated by man in faith, we avoid two very prevalent extremes of error, that which would make Baptism, by the mere act, and independent of faith, effective unto regeneration; and that on the other extreme,

ation and its Theology: As Represented in the Augsburg Confessions, and in the History and Literature of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1895), p. 565

which makes faith as an exercise of the human understanding, independent of the intermediate grace given and secured in Baptism, and by implication, more effective than even the word and promise of God.⁶⁸

The "neo-Lutheran" theologians in Europe today are fairly conservative in their approach to baptismal regeneration. Paul Feine, for instance, finds regeneration in Pauline theology used in a wide sense having an objective but also a subjective side whereby man helps himself to accomplish his regeneration. The subjective side of regeneration comes out clearly, he believes, in the *καὶνὴ κτίσις* concept and also in the expression "in Christ."⁶⁹ But in Titus 3:5, Feine finds only the objective side of regeneration mentioned, and there it is passive in a double respect. Here baptismal regeneration consists in this that God acts and that the Holy Spirit, which Christ our Saviour richly pours upon us in the sacrament, creates us into new persons.⁷⁰ The work of sanctification follows on from this. Johannes Schneider also is quick to

⁶⁸D. Worley, "Baptismal Regeneration," The Evangelical (Quarterly) Review, XVIII (January 1867), 50. This was one of a spate of articles written in reply to the Definite Platform on baptismal regeneration. Others were: Charles F. Schaeffer, "Baptismal Regeneration," The Evangelical Quarterly, VIII (January 1857), 303-54; Charles P. Krauth, "Baptism: The Doctrine Set Forth in Holy Scripture and Taught in the Evangelical Lutheran Church," The Evangelical (Quarterly) Review, XVII (July 1866), 309-68; Cyrus Thomas, "Regeneration," The Evangelical (Quarterly) Review, XIX (October 1868), 531-47; D. H. Geissinger, "Baptism and Regeneration," The Lutheran Church Review, IV (1885), 223-29.

⁶⁹Paul Feine, Theologie des Neuen Testaments, (8th edition; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1953), pp. 228, 230.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 230.

point out that the whole emphasis in Titus 3:5 is that baptism certainly is a real act of God. Faith is, of course, assumed as it is throughout the whole New Testament but it is not mentioned because it is only secondary. He rightly makes note of a very interesting fact also--how strongly the common Pauline concepts of the doctrine of salvation (βαπτισμός, ἔργα τὰ ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ, ἔλκος, δικαιοσύνη, χάρις) are bound up with this new word παλιγγενεσία in Titus 3:5-7--thus again emphasizing the act of God in baptism.⁷¹ Werner Elert rightly emphasizes this point too. Commenting on baptismal regeneration in Titus 3:5 he says:

In jeder dieser Beziehungen ist der Mensch nur Empfaenger, Gott allein der Spendende. Das Tun Gottes aber wird nicht durch die Taufe angedeutet oder symbolisch veranschaulicht, sondern vollzogen.⁷²

Elert is not belittling faith here, for he goes on to say that the forgiveness of sins is only received through repentance and faith, and this regeneration and renewal follow. Baptism is a kind of compendium of the entire gospel and therefore must be regarded as equal with the Church's Kerygma having both the power of creating and also of strengthening faith and new life.⁷³

⁷¹ Johannes Schneider, Die Taufe im Neuen Testament (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, c.1952), p. 63.

⁷² Werner Elert, Der Christliche Glaube: Grundlinien der Lutherischen Dogmatik (dritte und erneut durchgesehene und ergaenzte Auflage; Hamburg: Furche-Verlag, c.1956), p. 444.

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 445-46.

One other phase of modern Lutheranism worth mentioning in this sphere is the Theology of Lund in Sweden. Some of the theologians in this school have given expressions to their particular emphases in a book called This is the Church under the leadership of Anders Nygren. In this book Hugo Odeberg rightly states that baptism is not merely a sign of entry into the Church, nor is it something that happens to a human being by which he is changed from one condition to another, but a symbol in the true meaning of the word. That is, baptism does not merely give a picture of something but actually carries with it an essential reality.⁷⁴ Erik Sjoeborg speaks of a "sacramental" view of baptism found in the New Testament and thus describes baptism as being an actual divine event bringing about in man a regeneration which is a change-over from the age of sin and death to the sphere of righteousness and life.⁷⁵ The fullest expression of baptism however, is given by Ruben Josefson who approaches the subject from the standpoint of the sacrament as a "means of grace"--although he believes that the very expression "invites the misapprehension that man is here confronted with something other than God Himself." He then goes on to correct

⁷⁴Hugo Odeberg, "The Individualism of Today and the Concept of the Church in the New Testament," This is the Church, edited by Anders Nygren, translated by Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1952), p. 66.

⁷⁵Erik Sjoeborg, "The Church and the Cultus in the New Testament," This is the Church, p. 88.

this view by pointing out that just as in the Lord's Supper so also in baptism man is confronted by Christ in whom God is completely and totally present. Thus he explains the means of grace as the "ever-continued incarnation":

Just as Christ does not occupy some middle position between God and man, so the means of grace are not a separate something in which man confronts something other, lower and less than God himself. In this way the thought of the incarnation helps to interpret and reveal the deepest nature of the means of grace.⁷⁶

It therefore must be understood from this that baptism is God's work and can only be understood through faith. It is absolutely important, says Josefson, to remember this distinction in regard to regeneration in baptism. Regeneration in baptism cannot be rightly understood as a spiritual or moral quality nor as a personally experienced faith for it is not a change in the individual but in his position or status with God by which he has been translated from the kingdom of wrath to that of grace. He concludes:

Baptism and regeneration can be coupled with each other only when both are seen to be primarily the work of God. It would be easier for us to grasp the meaning of the sacrament if we could free the concept of regeneration from the meaning which has been imposed on it in recent centuries. The idea of a birth surely ought to suggest an action which has its source outside of ourselves. It ought to lead to a realization of the action of God's sovereign grace.⁷⁷

This is perhaps the clearest statement made recently on

⁷⁶Ruben Josefson, "The Church and Baptism," This is the Church, pp. 246-48.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 249.

baptismal regeneration and one which Lutherans certainly need to keep in the foreground. There is always the tendency to lean over to Reformed theology by over-emphasizing faith on the one hand, or to lean too far towards Roman Catholicism by thinking of baptism as a means of grace apart from God and efficacious in its own right on the other.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRADITIONAL REFORMED INTERPRETATIONS

The Reformed tradition grew up under the influence of a number of reformers, the chief figures being Zwingli and Calvin. But Calvin proved to be the most prominent and influential among them and largely shaped the doctrines and patterns of the Reformed communion although his influence was never as profound as that of Luther on the churches bearing his name. The Reformed churches were to some degree influenced by Luther in its early stages but a more lasting influence was that of humanism seen in the greater appeal to reason among the Reformed churches. The attitude to such doctrines as baptism thus proved to be more radical than found in the Lutheran tradition.

The Interpretation of Ulrich Zwingli

Ulrich Zwingli, the founder of the Swiss Reformed Church, was at first influenced by Luther's writings which he had read and circulated already in 1520 but he later disagreed with Luther because he felt Luther was not radical enough in his reform.

In his Reformation writings, Zwingli never really developed a theology of baptism except to define baptism simply as a covenant sign. He has, consequently, no full and unified doctrine on this subject--no concept of sacramental

efficacy, very little hint of baptismal regeneration, and he only half-heartedly held to infant baptism over against the errors of the Anabaptists. Perhaps his fullest statement on baptism was made in a small treatise entitled, Von dem Touff, von Widertouff und vom Kindertouff.¹ He begins this treatise by roundly condemning all the teachers of the Church back to the Apostles themselves--"I can only conclude," he wrote, "that all the doctors have been in error from the time of the apostles."² His reason for condemning them is that he believed they all ascribed to the water a power which it does not have. So, unfalteringly, he put forth his own views on baptism not firmly believing that he was guided "not by our own caprice but by the Word of God."³

Zwingli understood the word baptism as being used in four different ways--for the immersion in water whereby man is pledged individually to the Christian life, for the inward enlightenment which comes about when man comes to know God (otherwise known as the baptism of the Spirit), for the "external teaching of salvation and external immersion in water," and for "external baptism and internal faith, that is

¹Translated into English by G. W. Bromiley under the title, "On Baptism," Zwingli and Bullinger: Selected Translations with Introductions and Notes, in The Library of Christian Classics (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1953), XXIV.

²Ibid., p. 130.

³Ibid., p. 132.

for the Christian salvation and dispensation as a whole."⁴ This gave Zwingli a basis for his concept of baptism as a mere covenant sign and pledge and an opening for explaining away such passages as Titus 3:5, John 3:5 and the like. His great weakness here lies in his failure to seek any real essential unity between his four definitions. Luther also spoke of baptism as a sign, but for him there was no such thing as the rigid separation of the sign and the thing signified as we find in Zwingli.

No matter how Zwingli looked at it he could not find how salvation could ever come through baptism just as he could not see how the spoken or material word could ever have any power to lead a person away from sin to his Saviour. This is the argument he uses:

It is still the case that spoken or material word has no greater power than that of the water. For none can remit sin but God alone. So then, even if--as they say--the word and the element together constitute the sacrament, the sacrament can never cleanse the soul, for it is only an external thing. The word which saves the soul is not the word outwardly spoken, but the word inwardly understood and believed.⁵

This type of argument is obviously dangerous and rather suspect. Such a drastic separation between the external and the internal is quite unrealistic. Zwingli here proves over-zealous in keeping God and His power first and foremost before us to the extent that he belittles the means which God uses for bringing

⁴Ibid., p. 132.

⁵Ibid., p. 154.

His grace to man. Yet he himself leans upon the written Word as the means God uses for conveying His saving Gospel to man. The Word, therefore, must be more than a mere sign if God comes to us through it, and so also must baptism which, as the Reformers sometimes described it, is verbum visibile. The acute separation between the sign and the thing signified upheld by Zwingli was undoubtedly his extreme reaction to the magical type of baptism taught in the Roman Church. This forced him into some strange exegesis at times. For instance, he had to deny that John 3:5 could ever refer to water-baptism as it had always been understood, but instead he had to explain "water" as meaning "confession and faith in Christ."⁶ The same explaining away is done with 1 Peter 3:21 where he denies that baptism can do anything more than wash the body. For since baptism cannot take away sin it cannot save us--"Sin is taken away only when we have a good conscience before God."⁷ Again in Romans 6 Zwingli says Paul is not speaking about external baptism but internal, a clear proof that baptism is an initiatory sign which introduces or pledges us to Christ.⁸ All this points again to Zwingli's basic error--the unnatural separation of sign and thing signified, of external and internal, of body and soul. Clearly, when Zwingli denies any power to baptism, he really means to deny any power to water but he

⁶Ibid., p. 160.

⁷Ibid., p. 153.

⁸Ibid., p. 151.

fails to see any difference between the two. He certainly does not want to deny any power to God, only to water. Yet in effect he is denying God the power to use the means He has set up for the purpose--His Word and Sacraments.

So with Zwingli baptism becomes merely a covenant sign. It does not confirm faith but it pledges the person baptized to faith and discipleship. It does not effect any inward change but merely symbolizes it. Zwingli believed that in the final analysis baptism is only administered and received "for the sake of fellow-believers, not for a supposed effect in those who receive it."⁹ Yet the increasing emphasis on baptism as a pledge of what we ought to do rather than what God has already done for us in Christ led to a false subjectivism with its entire emphasis on the faith of the person baptized. This was putting the cart before the horse and it resulted in a sublime sacrament being brought to degradation--man was no longer receiving in baptism the gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation from the Merciful Father accepted by faith, but was pledging himself to greater faith and discipleship to the Almighty God of the heavens. Needless to say this leaves no room for baptismal regeneration. Certainly, Zwingli knew of the regeneration of the soul, but this came about through conversion and never through baptism.

⁹Ibid., p. 136.

The Interpretation of John Calvin

Unlike Zwingli, John Calvin was not simply a reactionary but a thorough-going theologian who sought to set out the doctrines of Christianity according to Holy Scripture and as they had been understood before corruption set in. Yet Calvin was more influenced by humanism than was Zwingli and this comes out in his writings. In one sense Calvin was truly a successor of Zwingli and his followers in that he spoke of baptism as a sign and symbol of the covenant, but he refined this idea and added to it also the concept of baptism as the seal of the covenant. In another sense Calvin was much closer to Luther in thought than to Zwingli although he kept to the typical Reformed terminology. And, indeed, Calvin shows how much he was influenced by Luther's Babylonian Captivity of the Church in his interpretation of baptism. So it must be understood that Calvin is to be judged not by the letter of his writings but by the spirit, not by the terminology he used but rather by the meaning behind his terminology.

As with Luther, Calvin's main concern in the doctrine of baptism was that the baptismal water be not understood as having a power inherent in itself and thus effecting grace ex opere operato. Also like Luther he was impressed by the importance given to baptism by Jesus, and he therefore could not hold with the Zwinglian concept which only belittled the sacrament. Undoubtedly influenced by Luther's emphasis that in baptism we are declared righteous before God and that our

sins are no longer imputed to us Calvin described baptism as "a sign and evidence of our justification" and as "a kind of sealed instrument" by which our Lord assures us that our sins are wiped out and are no longer imputed to us. That is why Christ has commanded us to be baptized for the remission of sins. Thus he condemns Zwingli's view:

Hence those who have thought that baptism is nothing else than the badge and mark by which we profess our religion before men, in the same way as soldiers profess their profession by bearing the insignia of their commander, having [sic] not attended to what was the principle thing in baptism; and that is that we are to receive it in connection with the promise, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark xvi. 16).¹⁰

The new concept Calvin brings to his doctrine is one he had gained from his studies in law--the concept of the seal which in his time played an important part in legal transactions. The seal symbolized the deed to which it was affixed and confirmed the ownership of property or inheritance for the one who received it. Calvin decided that this aptly described baptism because it confirms to the person baptized the grace of God offered to him in the blood of Christ.¹¹ Just as the Old Testament circumcision was a seal or covenant of the grace yet to come, so New Testament baptism was a seal of the grace already given in Christ. This was the only difference Calvin could see between the two rites. Unlike

¹⁰ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, IV:xv:1, translated by Henry Beveridge (London: James Clarke & Co. Limited, 1949), II, 513.

¹¹ Vide F. W. Dillistone, Christianity and Symbolism (London: Collins, 1955), pp. 203-04.

Luther, Calvin puts no emphasis on the Word in baptism. He certainly regarded the sacrament as the visible Word, as a "sculpture and image of that grace of God which the word more fully illustrates,"¹² but otherwise he followed Zwingli in making too artificial a separation of the Word and that which the Word conveyed. Consequently, this same artificial separation is made between Christ and His atoning work and the sacrament of baptism. For Calvin the Word announces the message of purification, baptism seals this message but the actual purification is something separate from both and comes about through the sprinkling of the blood of Christ.¹³ Fortunately, however, Calvin does not always press this legal separation but realizes that there must be a closer connection between the two, which cannot entirely be explained in rational terms. Thus he explains himself:

This analogy or similitude furnishes the surest rule in the sacraments--viz. that in corporeal things we are to see spiritual, just as if they were actually exhibited to our eye, since the Lord has been pleased to represent them by such figures; not that such graces are included and bound in the sacrament, so as to be conferred by its efficacy, but only that by this badge the Lord declares to us that he is pleased to bestow all these things upon us. Nor does he merely feed our eyes with bare show; he leads us to the actual object, and effectually performs what he figures.¹⁴

¹²Ibid., p. 204.

¹³Calvin, Institutes, IV:xv:2, trans. by Beveridge, II, 513.

¹⁴Calvin, Institutes, IV:xv:14, trans. by Beveridge, II, 520.

The last statement in the above quotation certainly comes very close to speaking of the effectiveness of baptism and the real union of Christ with the sacrament. So also when speaking of Romans 6 and Colossians 2:12 he says:

Those who receive baptism with true faith truly feel the efficacy of Christ's death in the mortification of their flesh and the efficacy of his resurrection in the quickening of the Spirit.¹⁵

These statements must be remembered when interpreting Calvin's attitude toward baptismal regeneration. Yet it was because Calvin neglected to bring these thoughts more to the fore while continuing to emphasize the legal aspect of the seal that he thus encouraged many to understand baptism as an arid symbol of the establishment of a legal bond, a seal which simply signifies membership in the Church and a different stature from those outside the Body of Christ.¹⁶ Such understanding, of course, makes Calvin seem very close to Zwingli in his basic views but such an understanding is just what Calvin did not want. This is brought out again in his interpretation of Titus 3:5:

Calvin readily accepted that Titus 3:5 refers to baptism, because baptism is part of the revelation of God in as far as it confirms our faith. "Besides," he says,

baptism--being the entrance into the Church, and the symbol of our ingrafting into Christ--is here

¹⁵Calvin, Institutes IV:xv:5, trans. by Beveridge, II, 515.

¹⁶Cf. Dillistone, p. 206.

appropriately introduced by Paul when he intends to show in what manner the grace of God appeared to us.¹⁷

But the very words of this text--the fact that Paul has so inseparably connected the grace of God in Christ with baptism--leads Calvin to be as true to this as he can in spite of his Zwinglian concept that the sign is separable from the thing signified. So he concedes that baptism is no empty figure but that God is inwardly accomplishing by His power what He illustrates in the sacrament, and so "washing of regeneration" is a true and expressive term for baptism. So he goes on:

The efficacy and use of the sacraments will be properly understood by him who shall connect the sign and the thing signified, in such a manner as not to make the sign unmeaning and inefficacious, and who nevertheless shall not, for the sake of adorning the sign, take away from the Holy Spirit what belongs to him. Although by baptism wicked men are neither washed nor renewed, yet it retains that power, so far as it relates to God, because, although they reject the grace of God, still it is offered to them. But here Paul addresses believers, in whom baptism is always efficacious, and in whom therefore, it is properly connected with its truth and efficacy.¹⁸

Taking this statement as it is we find that Calvin is trying to say the same thing as Luther, although Luther would never have said that baptism is efficacious only some of the time. That would make baptism subjective as Calvin does indeed

¹⁷ John Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, translated from the original Latin by William Pringle (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), p. 333.

¹⁸ Ibid. The italics are mine.

make it. And with Luther Calvin also sees another side to baptism which, he believes, is expressed in the second part of Titus 3:5. The efficacy of baptism must be proved by "newness of life." Calvin takes the "renewing of the Holy Spirit" as being almost synonymous with the "washing of regeneration." The former is an explanation of the latter so that we may know that we are washed by the power of the Holy Spirit and not by water, that we may fix our attention on the grace of God in Christ and not on the sign. And here Calvin even goes further and seems to fall back to his old rational approach of separating sign and thing signified, visible and invisible. He says:

It is therefore the Spirit of God who regenerates us, and makes us new creatures, but because his grace is invisible and hidden, a visible symbol of it is beheld in baptism.¹⁹

This retreat is symptomatic of all Calvin's statements on baptism and is misleading. With Luther, Calvin certainly feels a real unity of the work of Christ with the sacrament ordained by Him. But in his reaction against the Roman Catholic concept of power in the baptismal water he goes too far and hides under the rationalistic Zwinglian concept of separation. Part of the reason for this is obviously his fear to take the middle way lest he be misunderstood as teaching an ex opere operato baptism. Thus he often speaks cautiously of baptism "assuring" or "promising" free pardon of sins,

¹⁹Ibid., p. 334.

imputation of righteousness and the grace of the Holy Spirit.²⁰

This inconsistency goes over into his teaching on infant baptism and gives us further insight into his attitude towards baptismal regeneration. Certainly, infants receive some benefits from their baptism, for by it they are ingrafted into the body of Christ and become of greater interest to other members. Moreover, by baptism God adopts them as His sons even before they can recognize Him as their Father, and anyone who does not permit them to be baptized is rejecting the offered grace.²¹ Just like anyone else, infants are born of Adam and consequently inherit sin and death. For this reason Christ commanded that they be brought to Him because He is life and can regenerate them spiritually, which He does by making them partners with Himself through baptism.²² This makes baptism an entirely objective act of God, and so the inevitable question arises which also troubled Luther: Must there not be the reciprocation of faith before the sacrament becomes meaningful? Can there be any regeneration without faith? Calvin at first went along with Luther's suggestion that infants must be endowed with a faith of their own, since faith is necessary for salvation.²³ But he later changed

²⁰Calvin, Institutes IV:xv;5, trans. by Beveridge, II, 515.

²¹Calvin, Institutes IV:xvi:9, trans. by Beveridge, II, 535.

²²Calvin, Institutes IV:xvi:17, trans. by Beveridge, II, 540.

²³Francois Wendel, Calvin: The Origins and Development

the idea and contended that

children are baptized for future repentance and faith. Though these are not yet formed in them, yet the seed of both lies hid in them by the secret operation of the Holy Spirit.²⁴

Hence baptism, Calvin held, even for infants can be rightly termed the "washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." Moreover, the power of God to be able to regenerate infants at such an early stage must not be questioned, says Calvin. Children who are born sinners must either remain unaccepted and hated by God or be justified as Jesus clearly points out in John 3:3. And that God does regenerate infants is proved in the case of John the Baptist who was sanctified from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15).²⁵ Also, Calvin's beliefs concerning predestination influence his thoughts here. For none of the elect could possibly be called away from this present life before they had been sanctified and regenerated by the Holy Spirit, so God does this in a way which is incomprehensible to us. Calvin further seeks to clarify the whole matter:

If those on whom the Lord has bestowed his election, after receiving the sign of regeneration, depart this life before they become adults, he, by the incomprehensible energy of his Spirit, renews them in the way which he alone sees to be expedient. Should they reach

of His Religious Thought, translated by Philip Mairet (London: Collins, c.1963), pp. 324, 327.

²⁴Calvin, Institutes IV:xvi:20, trans. by Beveridge, II, 543.

²⁵Calvin, Institutes IV:xvi:17, trans. by Beveridge, II, 541.

an age when they can be instructed in the meaning of baptism, they will thereby be animated to greater zeal for renovation, the badge of which they will learn that they received in earliest infancy.²⁶

Here again we have seen Calvin speak of baptism for infants as a sacrament of regeneration and yet at another time speak of it simply as a badge or seal of the regeneration God brings about. Yet he acknowledges that the Word of God is the only seed of spiritual regeneration²⁷ and in baptism this Word and the Holy Spirit are deposited in the infant to bear fruit in due course.

So it cannot be denied that Calvin teaches a baptismal regeneration. But baptism only brings about this regeneration inasmuch as it assures us that we are ingrafted into the death and life of Christ and so united with Him that we become partakers of all His blessings:

For he consecrated and sanctified baptism in his own body that he might have it in common with us as the firmest bond of union and fellowship which he deigned to form with us; and hence Paul proves us to be the sons of God from the fact that we put on Christ in baptism (Gal. iii.27). . . . Regeneration we obtain from his death and resurrection only, when sanctified by his Spirit we are imbued with a new and spiritual nature.²⁸

Regeneration is an action of the Holy Spirit which is fulfilled and completed in the life of the baptized person who lives as a member of Christ in newness of life. Although

²⁶ Calvin, Institutes IV:xvi:21, trans. by Beveridge, II, 543.

²⁷ Calvin, Institutes IV:xvi:18, trans. by Beveridge, II, 542.

²⁸ Calvin, Institutes IV:xv:6, trans. by Beveridge, II, 515-16.

Calvin could speak of the complete objectivity of baptismal regeneration in regard to infants, he hesitated to do this as far as adults were concerned. Man is saved by the grace of God alone, but man's faith plays a much greater part in the importance and meaning of baptism for Calvin than it did for Luther. As long as Calvin speaks of baptism as a confirmation of what Christ has done he brings in the matter of faith--a human element into the divine sacrament. Faith is necessary for acceptance but it is only secondary. Calvin really only desired to make sure that baptism would not be understood as having power in itself but that the power and efficacy for our salvation rests with God. It is a pity that Calvin's disciples and opponents could not always have remembered this instead of making man's faith a greater issue. Calvin's fear of making the sacrament too objective has resulted in his often hazy connection between baptism and regeneration. But as long as Calvin speaks of the power of baptism he is speaking of a baptismal regeneration, as when he says:

We ought to consider that at whatever time we are baptized, we are washed and purified once for the whole of life. Wherefore, as often as we fall, we must recall the remembrance of our baptism, and thus fortify our minds, so as to feel certain and secure of the remission of sins. For though, when once administered, it seems to have passed, it is not abolished by subsequent sins. For the purity of Christ was therein offered to us, always is in force, and is not destroyed by any stain; it wipes and washes away all our defilements.²⁹

Thus in spite of his Zwinglian separation and his emphasis

²⁹Calvin, Institutes IV:xv:3, trans. by Beveridge, II, 514.

on baptism as the badge and seal of God's grace Calvin still gives the assurance of baptismal regeneration.

Some Traditional Reformed Views Since the Reformation

The Reformed Churches from the time of the Reformation to the present day largely bear the influence of Calvin. Some churches, however, were also influenced by Zwingli and his followers, others by Luther. Yet in the doctrine of baptism Calvin's ideas appear predominant. The purpose of this section is to feature a few expressions of this doctrine from a scattered variety of circumstances.

The Congregationalists who broke away from the Anglican Church in the latter part of the sixteenth century because of that Church's "papal elements" adhered fairly strictly to Calvinism, especially in the doctrine of baptism. In one of their earliest and most important declarations of faith, the Savoy Declaration of 1658, the Congregationalists followed very closely to Calvin's teachings. Baptism is described

as sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up (himself) unto God through Jesus Christ to walk in newness of life.

Thus baptism is for them primarily a portrayal of the whole spiritual life of the Christian from the gracious acts of God in Christ to man's response of dedication and discipleship. Not only those who profess faith and obedience to Christ are to be baptized but also the infants of believing parents. The Declaration also warns against the belief that

regeneration and salvation are inseparably connected with baptism or that those who have been baptized are necessarily regenerated yet

by the right use of this ordinance the grace promised is not only offered but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost to such (whether of age, or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will.³⁰

Just as in Calvin's writings this Declaration has the double view of baptism being on the one hand only a sign and seal of the objective work of God for man and man's subjective response, and on the other an efficacious sacrament conferring the Holy Spirit on those baptized and thus bringing about regeneration through baptism.

Turning to the Presbyterian Church we find a traditional Reformed view expressed by Charles Hodge, a conservative theologian of the nineteenth century. He defines the doctrine of baptismal regeneration as he believes it is generally understood thus:

It is that inward change in the state of the soul wrought by the Holy Spirit, by which it passes from death unto life; by which it is born again so as to become a child of God and an heir of eternal life. The doctrine of baptismal regeneration is the doctrine that this inward saving change is effected in baptism; so that those who are baptized are the subjects of that new birth which Christ declares to be necessary to salvation; and those who are not baptized have not experienced that new birth and are not in a state of salvation.³¹

³⁰ John Huxtable, "Christian Initiation in Congregational Churches," Theology, LV (1952), 167.

³¹ Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1873), III, 599-600.

This is certainly not the way baptismal regeneration is generally understood by the Reformers and those who follow them. Basically, baptismal regeneration simply means that God has ordained and uses the sacrament of baptism as one of His means to bring about a regeneration in man, that is, a new beginning made possible by God's proclamation to the individual that because of His mercy manifested in Jesus Christ He no longer imputes his sins unto him. Hence man has as little say in his rebirth as in his physical birth, although he has the power to reject and thus annul this regeneration through a lack of Christian faith and life. There is a vast difference between this definition and that of Hodge. However, having set up his strawman, Hodge proceeds to demolish it. Taking Titus 3:5 as one of the key texts quoted to support the doctrine of baptismal regeneration he examines it and validly denies that regeneration always follows baptism or that regeneration is inseparably connected with baptism. But he errs in looking upon baptism not as God's act but as man's act of faith. Consequently he finds no efficacy in baptism. The efficacy is really in man's faith, for it is the act of faith at baptism or at any time which effects union with Christ, secures the remission of sins, or the gift of the Holy Spirit.³² Hodge then questions whether Titus 3:5 does refer to baptism as an external rite

³² Ibid., III, 596.

at all. For, he says, *λουτρὸν παλιγγενεσίας* may be translated as "the washing which is regeneration," the inward washing of the soul and not the outward rite of baptism at all. This inward washing which is regeneration is then further explained in the text as the renewing of the Holy Spirit.³³ Thus Hodge also falls into the error of separating the body from the soul and the sign from the thing signified. Such a concept of separation is foreign to the New Testament Church which had its roots not in Greek philosophy but in Judaism. It becomes clear that Hodge no longer understands regeneration in the same way as Calvin did, as an imputed righteousness, but rather as some experience which man must feel and recognize.³⁴ Another argument which Hodge brings against the doctrine of baptismal regeneration is that in the case of adults faith and repentance are the pre-conditions of baptism but that these are actually the fruits of regeneration. Therefore a person, before he can approach baptism, must be regenerated. Hodge argues, regeneration cannot be the effect of baptism since it is its prerequisite.³⁵ This must be answered by pointing again to the meaning of baptismal regeneration--that in baptism God is appropriating His grace to the individual, a grace which the person being baptized

³³ *Ibid.* take up their pens to dispute with Barth. For

³⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 599. ily a witness to the person being

³⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 601. at grace in Jesus Christ, of his

may already understand and believe from the gospel but of which he now has the assurance in baptism that it is his own. Thus we can and must speak of baptismal regeneration just as we speak about the gospel as the regenerating power of God unto salvation. Baptism has the same life-giving message as the gospel with the difference that baptism is proclaimed and appropriated to the individual. This baptismal regeneration is not thus a mere external rite, nor does it give title to eternal life for those who resist God's grace and reject God's mercy; nor does it produce union with Christ and cleansing from sins ex opere operato but it produces union with Christ and cleanses from sins only through the power and work of Jesus Christ which must be accepted by faith. It gives title to eternal life for all who respond to God's grace and accept His salvation.

Turning now to modern times, the one monograph on baptism which has been responsible for a whole spate of books, articles, and pamphlets on baptism has been Karl Barth's lecture delivered in 1943 and published under the title Die Kirchliche Lehre von der Taufe. Here Barth takes up the traditional Reformed standpoint but questions the wisdom of and the biblical foundation for infant baptism. It is this latter point that has led many theologians of different persuasion to take up their pens to dispute with Barth. For Barth, baptism is primarily a witness to the person being baptized of God's covenant grace in Jesus Christ, of his

acceptance as God's child and as a member under His covenant. It is the witness to him of the active Christian life he must lead as a response to God's grace.³⁶ But baptism is also a seal and as such, says Barth,

it saves, sanctifies, purifies, mediates and gives the forgiveness of sins and the grace of the Holy Spirit, it effects the new birth, it is the admission of man into the covenant of grace and into the Church.³⁷

Yet in the same breath Barth condemns the "Roman and Lutheran and Anglican baptismal teaching" for teaching the same.³⁸

It becomes clear that what he really means is that baptism does not effect these things but simply signifies and promises the person being baptized that they are his in Christ if he accepts them in true faith. But if he already believes this, then baptism confirms it and gives him added assurance that God has done this for him. In the same way Barth speaks of the power of baptism which lies in the "free word and deed of Jesus Christ."³⁹ In other words, it is a living and expressive representation of the whole movement of sacred history and this makes it res potentissima et efficacissima.⁴⁰ But this is only playing with words. What Barth really wants to say

³⁶Karl Barth, The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism, translated by Ernest A. Payne (London: SCM Press, 1948), p. 14.

³⁷Ibid., p. 29.

³⁸Ibid., p. 26.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 15, 27.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 16.

is that baptism has no power at all but simply is a representation or sign of the power which is the gracious act of God in Christ. He rejects the idea that baptism could have power in that God uses it as a means for bringing His grace to man. He falsely accuses the Lutheran Church (coupling it with the Roman Catholic and Anglican) of teaching that baptism is the causa salutis, whereas he believes that the power of baptism lies in its being the cognitio salutis.⁴¹ This latter he describes as an illustration, as a sign of the promise, as a sign of comfort and warning, as a sign that the person baptized is engaged in a life of responsibility, a sign which fulfils the desire of man to seek the assurance of his salvation. However, when looking at Barth's doctrine of baptism in general as objectively as possible one must grant that he is seeking to say essentially the same as Luther did, but he destroys the labour of his good intentions by allowing man's faith to be put on a par with God's grace in baptism. In fact, baptism is really centred around man's faith--as a witness, seal, and assurance to faith. Baptism gives faith the assurance of the divine certainty of that which faith has already grasped. It seals faith to its object and answers man's wish "to be not only inwardly convinced of the fellowship of Jesus Christ with him but once for all to get a sight of it."⁴² That baptism can and does all these things for man

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴² Ibid., p. 42.

such as strengthening his faith and answering his desires for assurance is certainly true but they are, all said and done, only secondary consideration. Yet Barth seeks to make them an integral part of the sacrament and, consequently, infant baptism must be denied. Calvin did not have to do this because he did not lay so much stress on faith. Baptism for him was still primarily an act of God even though with adolescence there came an increasing need for the activity and response of faith. But Barth finds Calvin's stand hard to understand as if he together with Luther and other Reformers taught a double baptism--one kind for adults and another for infants. So from his standpoint with the centrality of faith Barth believed that there are parts of Calvin's doctrine where he obviously was not sure of himself,

but visibly nervous, in a hopelessly confused train of thought, abusing where he ought to inform and when he wants to convince, seeking a way in the fog, which can lead him to no goal, because he has none.⁴³

Every baptism for Barth had to have decision, confession, and consent for it to be valid. Yet he condemns infant baptism on so-called exegetical grounds:

From the standpoint of a doctrine of baptism, infant-baptism can hardly be preserved without exegetical and practical artifices and sophisms--the proof to the contrary has yet to be supplied!⁴⁴

Yet infant baptism is not an exegetical issue at all but a

⁴³ Ibid., p. 49.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

theological one. For the New Testament Church was only in its initial stages knowing nothing of the established order of today and consequently infant baptism would have been less prevalent. However, Barth still rejects it on the basis of his theology which puts faith first. So this leaves no room for baptismal regeneration, and Barth does not attempt to explain how Titus 3:5 may be understood. Even though he speaks of baptism having power and efficacy it is clear that this is not what he means but that he only uses this terminology because Scripture often does.

Many others following in the Reformed tradition also over-emphasize faith and speak of baptism as being invalid without personal decision.⁴⁵ Some make an unbiblical separation between water baptism and Spirit baptism, while others stress that baptism is simply a picture or seal of the act of God in Jesus Christ. Most of them claim to be Calvinists but few teach baptismal regeneration as Calvin did.

⁴⁵E.g. Ewald Klingelhoefer, Die neutestamentliche Taufe: Eine schriftgebundene Darstellung (Witten(Ruhr): Bundes-Verlag, 1952), p. 36.

CHAPTER V

MODERN VIEWS ON BAPTISMAL REGENERATION

There have always been views on the doctrine of baptism and baptismal regeneration which have differed from the traditional Roman Catholic, Lutheran, or Reformed standpoints, or which have changed substantially in recent times. Some of these also are worthy of comment.

The Church of Scotland

In 1953 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland appointed a Special Commission on Baptism to make a fresh study of the doctrine of baptism, and through its report "to stimulate and guide such thought and study throughout the Church as may lead to theological agreement and uniform practice."¹ This Commission submitted their first report in 1955 followed by other reports in 1956, 1957, and 1958 with a final revision of the 1955 report being published in 1958.² These reports are primarily an examination of the biblical doctrine of baptism and how the doctrine was

¹The Church of Scotland, Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism: May 1956 (Edinburgh: William Blackwell & Sons Ltd., 1956), p. 4.

²This revision was published under the title: The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism: A Study Document Issued by The Special Commission on Baptism of the Church of Scotland (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1958).

understood and interpreted throughout the history of the Church and especially in the Church of Scotland. But secondarily it is a critique of the traditional Reformed terminology and a definite but cautious move to a more Lutheran formulation of the doctrine. In its first report the Commission stated:

Our traditional formulation of the doctrine of Baptism needs correction. To speak of Baptism as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace" is not the language of the New Testament. . . . The dualism of this traditional definition obscures the fact that Baptism is primarily related to the Person and Work of Christ.³

In the historical survey of baptism in the Church of Scotland presented by the Commission it can be seen how Calvinistic their doctrine is, yet they go further in speaking of the power and efficacy of baptism. Thus in Article XXI of the Scots Confession drawn up in 1560 it is stated that baptism is the mark of those brought into the Covenant, it exercises the faith of God's people, and seals to them the assurance of His promise and their union with Christ. Then it goes on:

And thus we utterly damn the vanity of those who affirm the sacraments to be nothing else but naked and bare signs. No, we assuredly believe that by Baptism we are ingrafted in Jesus Christ, to be made partakers of His justice, by which our sins are covered and remitted.⁴

The Order of Baptism in the Scottish Book of Common Order

³The Church of Scotland, Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1955 (Edinburgh: William Blackwell and Sons Ltd., 1955), p. 46.

⁴Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1958 (Edinburgh: William Blackwell and Sons Ltd., 1958), p. 64.

brings out the Reformed separation of sign and thing signified by saying that "like as water outwardly doth wash away the filth of the body, so inwardly doth the virtue of Christ's blood purge our souls." Further:

The justice of Jesus Christ is made ours by Baptism; not that we think any such virtue or power to be included in this visible water, or outward action . . . but that our Saviour Christ . . . will, by the power of His Holy Spirit, effectually work in the hearts of His Elect, in time convenient, all that is meant and signified by the same.

This is then described as regeneration which is said to consist in resisting the lusts of the flesh and striving to live in newness of life, which we receive in Baptism.⁵ Admittedly, this is stated rather ambiguously but it leaves one with the impression that regeneration is something subjective, dependent upon the faith of the person baptized. The distinction between outward and inward is found also in the Second Helvetic Confession endorsed by the Reformed Church in Scotland in 1566. There it is stated:

Inwardly we are regenerated, purified and renewed by God through His Holy Spirit, but outwardly receive the seal of these great gifts in water, by which those great benefits are represented and as it were set before us to be discerned by our very eyes. Therefore we are baptized--that is, washed, or sprinkled with visible water.

The Scottish Reformer, John Knox, writes in the same vein. In baptism the Holy Spirit is promised and given at a

⁵Ibid., p. 66.

⁶Ibid., p. 69.

convenient time and He sanctifies and regenerates one through union with Christ. This is why baptism is called the "washing of regeneration." But here again there is a mixing together of justification and sanctification in the meaning of regeneration. Faith again becomes the effective instrument for "it is by faith and not by the external signs God purges our hearts" yet man needs baptism as an assurance to that faith. Regeneration is described by Knox as the continual working of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the elect long after baptism has been administered, and the consequent striving to live in newness of life is also part of this regeneration.⁷

A strong influence on the early Scottish Church came from the Catechisms used. The first and most important of these was Calvin's Catechism in which Calvin had set forth teaching of baptism as representing remission of sins and regeneration. Yet baptism is not simply a figure but a figure which "has the verity joined unto it . . . wherefore it is certain that remission of sins and newness of life is offered to us in Baptism and that we receive the same there." We actually obtain the grace of regeneration in baptism because "we are there clothed with Christ and indued with His Holy Spirit" providing we do not make ourselves unworthy by lack of faith.⁸ Here again Calvin shows that he can make a stronger statement

⁷ Ibid., p. 15.

⁸ Ibid., p. 71.

for baptismal regeneration than any of his followers. The later Heidelberg Catechism which came into use in Scotland in 1591 reverts to the arbitrary separation of the work of Christ and baptism which is again described simply as a visible sign and seal by which God more fully declares and seals unto us the promise of the Gospel. Baptism is also called the washing of regeneration because by this token and pledge God "may assure us that we are truly washed inwardly from our sins as we are washed with outward and visible water."⁹ These catechisms together with a small one written by John Craig and accepted by the Church in 1592 clearly had a great influence on the young Reformed Church and kept it thinking along traditional lines.

In 1647 the Church of Scotland adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith which has remained as its principal doctrinal standard. In this Confession the sacraments are described in the usual Reformed way as "holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace" but in every sacrament there is

a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.¹⁰

This is perhaps the best explanation of Calvin's position outside of Calvin's own writings. This is what Calvin meant

⁹Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 32.

when he spoke of a "sacramental mode of speaking." Thus the Confession rightly states that the sacrament has no power of itself but is dependent for its efficacy upon the work of the Holy Spirit and the Word.¹¹ Although the Confession continues to refer to baptism as the sign and seal of remission of sins and regeneration, the objectivity of baptism and its actual efficacy is acknowledged in the teaching on infant baptism. For Christ bestows upon the infants baptized His inheritance and grace and they are ingrafted into Him. Their natural birth is sanctified and so in effect they are regenerated.¹² This is baptismal regeneration which is further expounded in the statement:

The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own Will, in His appointed time.¹³

This, of course, strongly bears the stamp of Calvin's doctrine of predestination and was influenced by it to a certain degree. This Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms have had abiding influence on the Church of Scotland to the present day.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 32-33.

¹² Ibid., p. 36.

¹³ Ibid., p. 37.

The Commission, in its Report in 1955, certainly came all out for the efficacy and power of baptism and for baptismal regeneration properly understood. Although faith is required as a response to baptism, the Commission explains, it is not faith that saves but Christ Himself alone. Consequently, we are passive subjects in baptism. In baptism we are grafted together with Christ in a real and substantial union, a living union which grows throughout our whole life and is nourished by the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In this union Christ's life overflows into the life of the person baptized and regenerates him with the power of the resurrection. For this reason Paul properly calls baptism "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."¹⁴ Naturally, this meaning of baptism can only be comprehended by faith until the redemption of our body, so it is sometimes called a *μυστήριον*, in the New Testament. The Commission further asserts:

It is God the Creator who is active in Baptism, so that under His action Baptism becomes the Sacrament of the New Creation, the rite by which we enter on the regenerate life.¹⁵

In a comparison of the Old Testament purification rites with New Testament baptism the Commission concludes that whereas the old purification rites bore no efficacy in themselves and their sole purpose was to point to Christ and His act of

¹⁴Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1955, p. 18.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 36.

atonement, Christian baptism is a Sacrament of the actual atonement, spoken of in the New Testament not as a mere ceremony of washing but as saving us, well described in Titus 3:5.¹⁶ This is certainly a big step away from the traditional Reformed expressions of this doctrine. But the Commission's strongest criticism of the Reformed tradition is given in its 1956 Report where it says that while rejecting the errors of Roman Catholicism "Protestants" (still obviously referring to Reformed) tend to think in psychological rather than in theological terms and in subjective rather than objective terms and so they react against one extreme with another.

The rejection of ex opere operato views of the Sacraments tends to become the reduction of them to merely symbolical acts; the stress on faith rather than on works tends to lead to an over-emphasis upon subjective states of emotion, and the biblical conception of regeneration tends to disappear, its place being taken by either a moralistic or a pentecostal conception of perfection.¹⁷

In its final study document the Commission suggests three changes of emphasis from the traditional Reformed doctrine as necessary for a proper Biblical understanding of baptism. First of all, baptism should be understood as an "initiation into a saving relationship with Christ, rather than the

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁷ Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1956, p. 7.

mechanical receiving of a gift." This relation is explained as a relationship to the saving acts of Christ and also to the glorified Christ who is present wherever His people meet in His name. It is a personal relationship and thus the meaning and efficacy of baptism cannot be limited to the moment of the baptismal act.¹⁸ Secondly, baptism should be understood as depending for its efficacy "primarily on the faithfulness of God, and only secondarily on our response of faith."¹⁹ This faithfulness of God is seen in His word and in the Covenant relationship. This is certainly a change of emphasis from the Reformed tradition for it is not only a shift to the objectivity of baptism but also to the power in the Word--both points which Luther emphasized in his doctrine on baptism. The Commission comments:

What is particularly significant for Baptism is that God creates through His Word (Genesis 1. 3,26). God does not consult man when He creates him; but by his very creation man is committed to responsibility--the responsibility to reflect God's glory and to respond to His love. The new creation in Christ is the supreme instance of God's faithfulness to His creative Word, in spite of the fact that man has spoiled God's original creation. Baptism is the sign and seal that we are born again into that new creation. Infants are no more responsible for being baptized than they are for being created, but, as they are created into responsibility, so they are baptized into responsibility--the responsibility to confess Christ and to do all to His glory.²⁰

¹⁸The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism, pp. 55-56.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 56.

²⁰Ibid., p. 57.

Faith is necessary in so far as it is by faith that we are able to fully comprehend what God has done for us and to respond to this. This faith, however, is really God's faithfulness at work in us.²¹ The third change the Commission recommends is that "the divine and human aspects of the sacrament must neither be confused nor separated." By this they mean, basically, that we must keep to the middle way between the two extremes--between the error on the one hand that baptism produces regeneration of itself (ex opere operato) and the error on the other that baptism is mere "outward and visible sign" for an inward and spiritual grace."²² This virtually becomes the Lutheran position between Roman Catholicism and Reformed.

All that has been said so far bears strong implication for the doctrine of baptismal regeneration as now understood by the Church of Scotland. The Reformed concept of regeneration as a moral renewal based on faith and largely separate from baptism is rejected and on the basis of Titus 3:5, John 3:5 and a study of *παλιγγενεσία* in the New Testament environment the Commission sees regeneration as a total act of God as little dependent upon the recipient as was his first birth. Moreover, in baptism God is recreating us and placing us into the new age, the new creation which He has inaugurated in Christ. Thus in baptism we are born anew or regenerated which

²¹ Ibid., p. 59.

²² Ibid., p. 62.

regeneration like the first generation "is ineffective unless it is followed by the giving of nourishment, which sustains the life that has been given and enables it to grow." This new life reaches its completion in the final *παλιγγενεσία*, the final creation of the new heaven and the new earth.²³ Baptism and this regeneration cannot be separated from each other because God uses baptism to seal and convey to the individual the regeneration which He has promised. Thus baptism is not based on faith, but faith is based on baptism. For baptism is not the consequence of faith but the bestowal of a status-- a new birth into Christ.

We cannot look to any outward and visible regeneration as a pre-condition of Baptism, for whether we use the language of regeneration or any of the other terms used by the New Testament, the truth is that the Christian life is an effort to realize in full and visible sanctification what we already are in status by God's prevenient love and grace.²⁴

It is clear from the above that what has happened here is that a church which has traditionally been Reformed has now rejected the Reformed doctrine of baptism and adopted a basically Lutheran standpoint retaining in effect those elements of Calvinist doctrine which came close to Luther's teaching which could easily be misconstrued as Roman Catholicism. This however, has come about as a result of an objective examination of the teaching of the New Testament.

²³Ibid., pp. 34-35.

²⁴Ibid., p. 36. The italics are mine.

Other Differences from the Traditional Interpretations

The attitude towards baptismal regeneration in the Anglican Church is not easily set down because it has no really authoritative Confession, and this allows for a variety in attitudes. Nevertheless, if there is anything which may be regarded as being in any way authoritative in the Church of England it would be the Book of Common Prayer with its thirty-nine Articles of Religion and even that really bears two distinct attitudes--Lutheran and Reformed. In the early stages of its formation this Church was largely under Lutheran influence but later the tide turned to Reformed theology through the influence of English churchmen who had studied under Calvin and his followers. The Articles of Religion bear both influences. For instance, in the article on the Sacraments (XXV) the first paragraph is taken almost word for word from the corresponding article (XIII) in the Lutheran Augsburg Confession. It begins:

Sacraments ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of men's profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God's goodwill towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him.²⁵

Yet in the article on baptism (XXVII) Reformed terminology and expression come to the fore. There baptism is described as

²⁵The Book of Common Prayer (London: Oxford University Press, n.d.), p. 378.

a sign of Regeneration or 'new Birth, whereby' as by an instrument, they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church; the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed; Faith is confirmed, and Grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God.²⁶

Both of these articles, however, can be understood as complementing each other either from a Lutheran or a Reformed viewpoint. From these baptism can be understood as being one of the means God uses to impart His grace to mankind in the Lutheran sense or as being the sign and seal of the grace which God imparts or has imparted in the Reformed sense. Faith is emphasized in both articles, but in the former the sacrament is spoken of as also bringing about faith whereas in the latter is the seal and confirmation of faith. Infant baptism is mentioned briefly and favourably as "most agreeable with the institution of Christ."²⁷ Regeneration, of which baptism is the sign, here means no more than the grafting of one into the Church and thus receiving the promise of forgiveness of sins and adoption. In the Ministration of Publick Baptism of Infants much of the liturgy is the same as in the Lutheran Church. Baptism is referred to as a "heavenly washing" and God is entreated in various prayers:

We call upon thee for this Infant, that he, coming to Thy holy Baptism, may receive remission of his sins by spiritual regeneration.

²⁶ The Book of Common Prayer, p. 379.

²⁷ Ibid.

And again:

Sanctify this water to the mystical washing away of sin;
and grant that this Child, now to be baptized therein,
may receive the fulness of thy grace

Then after the rite has been performed thanks is given to

God that

it hath pleased thee to regenerate this Infant with thy
holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own Child by
adoption and incorporate him into thy holy Church.

Yet throughout, there is a strong emphasis on faith with the sponsors taking the oath of obedience for the child.²⁸ In the Catechism we again find the typical Reformed terminology with a sacrament described as an "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us," but it is also a "means whereby we receive the same."²⁹ So the Anglican Church still retains elements of both traditions in its doctrine of baptism. This has encouraged a variety of attitudes--some speaking for baptismal regeneration and others against. In recent times the doctrine of baptism has become a point of controversy in the Church of England and, naturally, the concept of baptismal regeneration is affected by this. As has been pointed out, faith has always played an important part in this doctrine for Anglicans, and with this emphasis on faith it is only natural that the rite of confirmation should be given more and more importance as part of the

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 171-173.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 185.

initiation rites, and baptism should lose some of its importance and meaning. Consequently controversy has arisen whether infant baptism should be practiced at all and whether baptism and confirmation should not be combined.³⁰ This Anglican concern for a church rite which finds little place in the New Testament is plainly to the detriment of the sacrament which God instituted and Christ commanded. The power of God in baptism is forgotten in the over-emphasis on man's faith. This clearly is simply a reaction against the practices which a State church falls into. Baptismal regeneration is given no place here at all.

John Wesley (1703-1791), the founder of Methodism, broke away from the Anglican Church because he felt that the doctrine of sanctification had been neglected in that Church. This coloured his whole thinking and it has left a deep influence on the Methodist Church. The concept of regeneration, being "born again," consequently appealed to Wesley, a concept which he tended to understand subjectively as a moral change in man. But Wesley was never really consistent about this. Nor, for that matter, was he consistent in the matter of baptismal regeneration, nor even about the connection of baptism and regeneration. Yet he definitely made a distinction between justification and regeneration.

³⁰For a brief discussion on this vide Cyril E. Pocknee, The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Revision and Reform (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co. Limited, c.1962).

In this instance, however, he understands regeneration more objectively as a moral change brought about by God. Thus he wrote:

Justification implies only a relative, the new birth a real, change. God in justifying us does something for us; in begetting us again, He does the work in us. The former changes our outward relation to God, so that of enemies we become children; by the latter our inmost souls are changed, so that of sinners we become saints. The one restores us to the favour, the other to the image, of God. The one is the taking away of guilt, the other the taking away of power, of sin: so that, although they are joined together in point of time, yet are they of wholly distinct natures.³¹

In his 1756 "A Treatise on Baptism," which was really his revision of a paper his father had published many years before, Wesley contended for baptismal regeneration in what appears to be a mixture of Roman Catholic and Reformed terminology:

By water, then, as a means, the water of baptism, we are regenerated or born again; whence it is also called by the Apostle, "the washing of regeneration." Our Church therefore ascribes no greater virtue to baptism than Christ Himself has done. Nor does she it to the outward washing but to the inward grace, which, added thereto, makes it a sacrament. Herein a principle of grace is infused, which will not be wholly taken away, unless we quench the Holy Spirit of God by long continued wickedness.³²

Thus Wesley described baptism not merely as an outward washing symbolic of an inward grace but as a synthesis of the two. Baptismal regeneration is the infusion of an inde

³¹Quoted by Colin W. Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today (London: The Epworth Press, c.1960), p. 99.

³²Quoted by Paul S. Sanders, "John Wesley and Baptismal Regeneration," Religion in Life, XXIII (1953-54), 595.

indelible grace and the working of the Holy Spirit. Elsewhere he described baptismal regeneration as "the beginning of that total renovation, that sanctification of spirit, soul, and body," as "that great inward change by the Spirit," and as "both a means and seal of pardon."³³ This makes it clear that even though he sometimes used the Reformed terminology for baptism as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace" he still never separated the one from the other. So he regarded baptism as the normal beginning of the Christian's new life even though this normally took place in infancy.³⁴ Yet because he understood regeneration as a change wrought in the soul by the operation of the Holy Spirit, changing the whole manner of one's existence³⁵ he found a real tension between the beginning in baptism and the fulfilment in the life of the person, a tension which is borne out in his statement to those who had not responded to the work of the Holy Spirit in them:

Lean no more on the staff of that broken reed, that ye were born again in baptism. Who denies that you were then made children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven? But, notwithstanding this, ye are now children of the devil. Therefore, ye must be born again.³⁶

This emphasis in his preaching on being born again making it a purely subjective change of heart and will, a radical

³³Williams, p. 117.

³⁴Ibid., p. 118.

³⁵Sanders, p. 597.

³⁶Williams, p. 119.

experience of conversion, led Wesley to become inconsistent and to say: "Baptism is not the new birth; they are not one and the same thing."³⁷ Thus with his emphasis on the Christian life and its subjective regeneration, he was taking away the assurance by which a Christian finds strength and comfort in God's grace. Being primarily a preacher, Wesley did not bother to systematize his teachings as a theologian and so this tension in his teaching on regeneration and baptismal regeneration only led to confusion in Methodism. Williams comments on this:

Apparently understanding only the second emphasis in Wesley, American Methodism has since reduced the service of Baptism to the point where it is little more than a dedication, and in British Methodism, while far more of the structure of the service has been kept, all references to regeneration were excluded in 1882.³⁸

Part of the reason for this Williams puts down to the lack of an objective assurance in baptism:

We miss in Wesley's doctrine of assurance something of Luther's rigorous "I am baptized"; something of the reliance upon the promises of the gospel, objectively symbolized by baptism, which is able to sustain us in the midst of the assaults of our emotional enemies.³⁹

Where Wesley had failed in this regard a modern disciple, W. F. Flemington, has perhaps succeeded in his presentation of the doctrine of baptism. Flemington speaks of baptism as

³⁷ Ibid., p. 120.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 121.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 122.

an effective outward rite because "the love of God is using it as a means of grace"⁴⁰ and because it is the "instrument of divine goodness, the means whereby the free unmerited love of God is imparted to men."⁴¹ He remains consistent in speaking of the regeneration objectively as the gift of God but he still follows Wesley in thinking of it basically as a moral change in man, although this idea does not really play the important role it did for Wesley. For Flemington keeps the subjective and objective clearly separate. He speaks of baptism as the "kerygma in action" by which God makes available to the individual believer the saving act of Christ's death and resurrection and says that only when this objective significance of baptism is understood can one properly appreciate the relation between baptism and faith. "Baptism," he says, "can be subjectively significant only because, first of all, it is objectively real."⁴² While keeping to the Reformed tradition of speaking of an outward act and an inward reality Flemington, together with Wesley, makes it clear that any separation of these is false. His remarks on this are important:

It cannot be without significance that there is no passage in the New Testament which makes any ultimate separation between the outward rite of baptism and the

⁴⁰W. F. Flemington, The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism (London: SPCK, 1948), p. 103.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 104.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 123-24.

spiritual reality which the rite embodied. Both the act and the meaning of the act mattered--the two formed for the first Christians an indivisible unity.⁴³

It is significant that Flemington, representing the best in Methodism, reaches a similar conclusion here in regard to baptismal regeneration as has now been reached by the Church of Scotland.

A similar change of position appears to be taking place to a lesser degree among the Baptist Churches. Insofar as the early Baptists were influenced by the Anabaptists and Mennonites their approach to baptism was more Zwinglian than anything else. Their emphasis has always been on the faith of the individual, and baptism is traditionally really only a sign and pledge of that faith in the saving work of Christ. The First Confession, drawn up in London in 1646 states the two basic tenets of the Baptist doctrine--that baptism is only to be dispensed to persons who are professing faith, and that baptism is a sign of the faith declared in the rite, that is, a faith in the saving act of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection and in the certainty of similar resurrection to reign together with Christ.⁴⁴ This does not leave much place for an act of God in baptism. Consequently, the doctrine of baptismal regeneration has always been repudiated.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid., p. 111.

⁴⁴ Documents of the Christian Church, selected and edited by Henry Bettenson (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), p. 350.

⁴⁵ Ernest A. Payne, "Baptism and Church Membership Among the Baptists," Theology, LV(1952), p. 170.

But this repudiation is not made by one of the present-day leading Baptist theologians. G. R. Beasley-Murray. Although he denies any grounds for infant baptism he believes that the New Testament clearly and unambiguously speaks of baptismal regeneration, but a regeneration in which the believer must play a prominent part. For baptism, says Beasley-Murray, is a sacrament in which the divine and the human aspects meet together. Baptism is undertaken as the expression and pledge of repentance but yet

it presumes the activity of God, who therein accepts the baptized man turning to Him and makes of the act the pledge of his forgiveness and seal of the baptized into the Kingdom. Both the conversion and the baptism involve human and divine actions.⁴⁶

In Titus 3:5 he sees no difference in meaning between *παλιγγενεσία* and *ἀνακαίνωσις*. The Holy Spirit brings about the regeneration and renewal working creatively in the believer. Regeneration is explained as the experience in this age of the life of the age to come for him who believes that "Jesus by His resurrection had brought that age into being and by His Spirit has released its power into this."⁴⁷ Although faith is not mentioned in Titus 3:5 or in most of the Pauline baptismal sayings Beasley-Murray believes it is nevertheless always an integral part of Paul's baptismal

⁴⁶G. R. Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., c.1962), p. 35.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 212.

teaching.⁴⁸ In a typically Baptist way the active faith of the believer is still regarded as all-important yet it is not self-sufficient, just as baptism is not self-operative. Again grace and faith come together in baptism:

It is wrong to represent the function of faith as merely that of asking for baptism in which God works irrespective of man's attitude, or of understanding what God does in baptism, of evidencing an intention of making the appropriate response after baptism. Baptism is rather the divinely appointed rendezvous of grace for faith.⁴⁹

Titus 3:5 is, for Beasley-Murray, the most important text for showing that God uses baptism to impart His gifts through the operation of the Holy Spirit who performs in the believer what he is unable to do himself. Through baptism, therefore, God creates anew and gives new life. Here Beasley-Murray clearly contradicts the Reformed tradition when he speaks of the power of baptism and also when he connects justification with the baptismal act. Thus in speaking of Titus 3:5 he says:

No statement of the New Testament, not even Jn. 3:5, more unambiguously represents the power of baptism to lie in the operation of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁰

And further:

It would be possible . . . to think of justification as independent of the washing, but the impression is undoubtedly given that it took place at the time indicated by 'he saved us through the washing.'⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 213-214.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 273.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 215.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 215.

On the basis of this he comes out for the doctrine of baptismal regeneration in spite of the fact that it is an "abomination of desolation to a multitude of believers,"⁵² especially to Baptists. This is necessary because it is clearly taught in Titus 3:5 and John 3:5 and in all references to the reception of the Spirit, life in Christ, or references to the new man and new creation. Thus he takes regeneration to cover not only the new creation (justification) but also the new life (sanctification). This requires faith so therefore baptism cannot be administered to infants but only to adult believers. This is the logical conclusion he must come to after taking *παλιγγενεσία* and *ἀνακαίνωσις* in Titus 3:5 as synonyms. Nevertheless, this is a big step forward from the traditional Baptist standpoint.

There are a number of reasons why in this sacrament different denominations have been able to draw closer together. The most important reason is clearly the fact that there has been recently a trend away from the old system of Bible study in which the expositor would simply build upon a particular tradition or seek to vindicate a particular doctrinal system. This old system only led to false emphases and exaggerated differences. The trend has now been towards an historico-critical exegesis in which the exegete seeks to find the meaning of a particular doctrine in the complete

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 277.

environment in which it was given and then to apply this to man's situation. This common goal and method has led to a closer agreement on the doctrine of baptism and undoubtedly to a truer doctrine. However, one other trend has had an important influence in bringing the churches closer together on this doctrine and in goading them to the more realistic type of exegesis mentioned above, and that is the Ecumenical movement. The influence of this cannot be denied. The progress made is clearly seen in the Report on the Meaning of Baptism put out by the World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order. The central meaning of baptism, says the Report, is our incorporation into Christ with Whom we become one. This incorporation into Christ, however, is not some work of ours but purely the gracious dealing of the Triune God with us as portrayed in Titus 3:5.⁵³ For in the human act of baptism Christ performs the divine act of baptizing with the Holy Spirit "uniting man with himself in his death and resurrection--forgiving, justifying, reconciling, sanctifying, sealing with the promise." This is baptismal regeneration which is not seen as a momentary event but as an act which covers the whole of life:

To speak of 'baptismal regeneration' as if it were merely a momentary event is both to separate the rite

⁵³Theological Commission on Christ and the Church, One Lord, One Baptism: World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order Report on the Divine Trinity and the Unity of the Church and Report on the Meaning of Baptism (London: SCM Press Ltd., c.1960), p. 56.

of incorporation from Christ's own mighty act and to neglect the reference of baptism to the whole of life. But when Christ's act of joining man to himself, and the uniting of the baptized to the Church, upon which His Holy Spirit has been poured out, and the reference to the incorporation in baptism to the whole life are all held together, then it can be recognized in the deepest sense that this is a 'washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit.'⁵⁴

Although we must give our full assent to the latter sentence, it is doubtful that regeneration can really be described as a continuing process. The very etymology of the word rejects the idea of a continuing process. The process of growth in Christ brought about by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is still very much a part of baptism in that it is the renewal which is begun in the act of baptismal regeneration. In regard to the connection of faith and baptism, the Report declares that these two things are inseparably joined together in the New Testament. But this does not mean in the case of infants that an explicit decision is called for from the recipient at the time of his baptism but rather that he be baptized in an environment of faith, in the corporate faith of the believing community which pledges itself to provide such an environment.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 60-61.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 63.

CHAPTER VI

THE MODERN QUESTION: DOES TITUS 3:5 REFER TO BAPTISM?

Until within the last few decades there has never been any question of whether Titus 3:5 referred to the sacrament of baptism. It has always been taken as one of the principal baptismal texts. But recently the question has been raised in some Reformed circles whether the writer ever meant to refer to a sacrament at all. Essentially, it has been questioned from the standpoint that baptism is a mere sign and symbol and hence cannot be called a "washing of regeneration." This has been expressed a number of different ways. For instance, J. A. T. Robinson would rather take the "washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost" as the "whole ministry of Jesus from Jordan to Pentecost, conceived of as the great Baptism whereby 'he saves us.'"¹ If there is any reference to baptism, then, it is only to a Spirit baptism brought about by the work of Christ. E. K. Simpson, to give another example, believes that the writer has in mind in Titus 3:5 "far profounder issues than a sacramental observance." His further remarks show clearly that a sacrament for him has no real significance.

He goes on:

A spiritual economy cannot be tied to a material agency as an indispensable channel of grace. How can a sign

¹J. A. T. Robinson, "The One Baptism as a Category of New Testament Soteriology," Scottish Journal of Theology, VI (1953), 269.

engross the virtue of the thing signified? Salvation by occult qualities is a pagan conception which Rome has annexed and evolved with characteristic effrontery.²

Such expressions could perhaps have been passed over as a minority opinion with a particular bias had they not received serious and strong promotion from the son of Karl Barth whose arguments for his position we now find necessary to study.

The Argument of Markus Barth

Markus Barth finds it difficult to see any reference to the sacrament of baptism in Titus 3:5 because he begins with two main presuppositions: first of all, that the sacrament of baptism is an entirely human work similar in its sense, meaning, and action to a prayer,³ and secondly, that those who teach that this verse speaks of the sacrament of baptism think of the baptismal act as having saving power in and of itself. On the basis of these presuppositions Markus Barth's arguments are valid. But the presuppositions are clearly false. The rite of baptism is never looked upon in the baptismal texts as a purely human work, and the latter presupposition has been shown to be clearly incorrect in the foregoing chapters and is refuted even by Barth himself when he acknowledges that

²E. K. Simpson, The Pastoral Epistles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary (London: The Tyndale Press, 1954), p. 115.

³Gotthilf Doehler, "Der Grosse Katechismus und die gegenwaertige Taufproblematik," Lutherischer Rundblick, III (1955), 145.

Roman, Lutheran, Reformed, and Enthusiast theology accept Titus 3:5 as a baptismal reference.⁴ Nevertheless, on the basis of these presuppositions together with Mark 1:8 and passages in the Acts of the Apostles he contends that water-baptism and Spirit-baptism must be regarded as always different events and Titus 3:5 must not be made to contradict this:

Klar gemacht wird aber, das Wassertaufe und Geistverleihung nicht koinzidieren, sich nicht wie Zeichen und Sache, Sichtbar und Unsichtbar, Garantie und garantierte Summe zueinander verhalten. Sollte Tit. 3,5 gerade das Gegenteil von Johannes dem Täufer und der Apostelgeschichte lehren: die Identität oder Koinzidenz von Wasser- und Geisttaufe?⁵

Taking the various concepts in Titus 3:5 individually Markus Barth sets out to prove his point. He takes *ἐξώτερν* first and correctly states that "salvation" is not always identical with the objective redemptive act of God in Christ since salvation is only fulfilled in the life to come and thus it remains an eschatological and future act of God. Yet the "washing of regeneration" is called here an agent of this salvation, a washing which took place "when the goodness and loving kindness of God appeared," a reference to the saving acts of God in Christ, says Barth. Baptism could possibly have a place in this but Barth believes no compelling proof is offered in the concept for the need of such an

⁴Markus Barth, Die Taufe--Ein Sakrament? Ein Exegetischer Beitrag zum Gespräch ueber die Kirchliche Taufe (Zuerich: Evangelischer Verlag AG. Zollikon, 1951), p. 470.

⁵Ibid., p. 456.

interpretation.⁶

Again, taking the concept *ἔργα ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ*, Barth correctly asserts that this term does not have to be regarded as a polemic against a possible Judaistic front but better fits the context if it is taken to refer to righteousness generally such as man's truth, love, obedience, etcetera, towards God. He is right when he says that none of these works, even though carried out with the greatest earnestness, humility, effort, and self-denial, have any power to effect grace for God is not bound to them even though they may conform to His will. He is even right when he says that all human works not only of conviction and morality, but also the totality of the human acts of penitence and faith, prayer, preaching, and serving God may be included under the term, "works in righteousness." But it does not follow, as he asserts, that baptism therefore must be included under this term. He can make this assertion only on the presupposition that baptism is an entirely human work, and to define it otherwise, Barth claims, is to show a lack of humility and readiness for service and to define baptism as some kind of superwork which God and man accomplish together. Even such a superwork would have to be classed as a "work in righteousness." But the point which Barth somehow misses is that the writer is here saying that baptism is a work of God and not of man. Man is merely the

⁶Ibid., pp. 457-458.

recipient of God's saving mercy offered and delivered through the means of baptism, and the Holy Spirit poured out on him gives him the power to respond with newness of life. Markus Barth's point of view is the logical step on from Karl Barth's idea of baptism as a mixture of God's and man's work.⁷

Certainly, if baptism could be classed as a "work in righteousness" then the "washing of regeneration" would not mean baptism. But baptism nowhere in the New Testament is understood in that category. Barth also claims that if this text speaks of baptism, then the cross of Christ would have to share out its saving power and efficacy with baptism and eventually baptism would become the foremost power.⁸ But this does not follow as baptism should be understood only as the means God has ordained and uses to confer the saving power and efficacy of the cross of Christ unto man. Baptism as a sacrament has no power outside the power of the cross of Christ.

With his study of the preposition *διὰ* there can be full agreement. The instrumental meaning of the preposition must certainly not be weakened. The genitive of *ἀνακαίνωσις* is best taken as dependent on *λουτρόν* rather than on another invisible *διὰ* before *ἀνακαίνωσις*. There is only one means of salvation and that comes through the "washing of

⁷Doehler, p. 145.

⁸Barth, pp. 459-460.

regeneration and renewing of the Spirit." Of course, Barth believes this leaves no room for the sacrament of baptism as he is used to thinking in terms of water-baptism and Spirit-baptism as two entirely separate entities.⁹ But we can look at baptism as the work of God, who through the means of baptism brings to us personally the whole saving work of Christ, the imputing of His righteousness to us which indeed regenerates us and thus gives the seed for the new life, a renewal which is nourished and brought about by the working of the Holy Spirit who is poured out on us richly. The one *δική* is sufficient for this view.

The next term studied is *λουτρόν*. Barth believes Titus 2:14, where the writer speaks of Christ giving himself to purify (*καθαρίσει*) for Himself a people of His own, is important for the understanding of this term. He observes that this text speaks of the purification of a people (*λαός*) and not of single individuals. This, however, is nothing unusual for the Jews always thought in such corporate terms even though they practised circumcision. Baptism also is always thought of as the individual being incorporated into the Church, the *λαός* of God. Barth goes on to state that redemption and purification here are synonymous, that Christ's redeeming death on the cross is and effects the purification. The blood of Christ shed upon the cross purifies for all

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 460-461.

time. He then argues that if *λουτρον* is taken as referring to baptism then *καθαριζεν* in Titus 2:14 must refer to baptism also and this, he believes, would result in a rather strange interpretation:

Christus Jesus gab sich selbst dahin, damit wir von ihm getauft werden! Christi Tod ist dann wohl die Voraussetzung, die Taufe jedoch ist dann allein die Verwirklichung und der Vollzug der Reinigung und der durch sie bewirkten Eigentumsuebertragung.¹⁰

But this does not follow. Baptism is not excluded in either of these terms, yet in neither is baptism thought of as superseding the work of Christ on the cross. Rather, the primary emphasis in both cases is on the redeeming work of Christ on the cross, but when man thinks of how this redeeming work is appropriated to him personally he is reminded by the texts of the washing of baptism. This is intimated in Titus 2:14 by the verb *καθαριζεν* which, although primarily it speaks of spiritual cleansing, cannot in a Christian connext be divorced from baptism, which is more directly indicated in Titus 3:5 as the "washing of regeneration." Thus Christ's redemptive work and baptism can never be placed in contradistinction to each other. Rather, baptism is the agent of Christ's redemptive work and meaningless without it. It may be convenient for Barth to place them at variance but it is unrealistic. So also is his statement: "Das Kreuz ist notwendigerweise eine unvollkommene Reinigung wenn erst die

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 462.

Taufe vollkommen reinigt!"¹¹

Barth attacks the traditional view that *παλιγγενεσία* refers to baptismal regeneration on the ground that this concept does not speak of the regeneration of the individual but rather has a cosmic and national significance. This, he claims, is the heritage of Judaism which often spoke of world renewal, the new Israel, which is the meaning of *παλιγγενεσία* in Matthew 19:28, a concept taken over from the Stoics who spoke of a cosmic renewal by fire. On the basis of this Barth believes it is impossible to give an individualistic explanation to *παλιγγενεσία* in Titus 3:5. The language of the Mysteries which uses *παλιγγενεσία* to denote the personal regeneration of the individual cannot be regarded as having any influence on Titus 3:5 because such literature, Barth claims, is essentially later than the latest parts of the New Testament. Nor, he argues, can other parts of the New Testament which speak of a personal regeneration, such as John 3:3-5, 1 Peter 1:3,23; 2:2, have any influence on the word *παλιγγενεσία* as the word commonly used for such individual rebirth is *ἀναγεννᾶν*.¹² But this is merely an arbitrary separation. It is universally recognized that the New Testament Church often took over concepts from Judaism and Hellenism and gave them a new Christ-centred meaning.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 463.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 464.

Moreover, the regeneration of nation and individual are inseparable, for no nation becomes regenerated unless the individuals are regenerated. Consequently, in Christian usage where greater emphasis is placed on the individual within the corporate body the terms become interchangeable. The close connection between this individual regeneration and baptism is asserted everywhere in the New Testament baptismal references. Barth quotes 1 Peter 1:3,23 to deny this but the connection in 1 Peter 3:21 is irrefutable.

Similarly, Barth takes *ἀνακαινώσις* to mean not the renewal of the individual but cosmic renewal, the beginning of the new age, the appearance of the new heaven and new earth. This renewal comes about through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the people of God. Thus this cosmic renewal is described by Barth as the appropriate and indispensable soteriological and ecclesiastical correlative for the cosmic regeneration.¹³ The New Testament does know of such a corporate renewal yet the emphasis is undoubtedly on the renewal which must come in the individual as a response to the mercy and love of God in Christ and to the gift of the Holy Spirit. This idea is very strong in the Pauline epistles. Similarly here in Titus 3:5 the renewal is begun in the individual by the Holy Spirit and the Spirit gives man the power to continue growth in the new life. Baptism

¹³Ibid., pp. 467-468.

fits very well into this context as God's act of imparting the forgiveness of sins earned for man by Christ's redemptive work to the individual and thus bringing about man's rebirth. Inseparable from this act is the conferring of God's Spirit who begins the work of renewal. The two concepts are completely inseparable and are best looked upon as two facets of the one event, an event which is entirely divine. Man must respond by growing to newness of life in the Spirit but this is apart from the baptismal act. Although the act of baptism is once-for-all, the renewal which is initiated there must continue.

Markus Barth concludes his discussion on this text by acknowledging the difficulty of reaching an exact explanation of this verse:

Eine eigentliche exakte Erklärung von Tit. 3,5 kann allem Anschein nach auf Grund des heutigen Standes der exegetischen, religionswissenschaftlichen, archäologischen und theologischen Forschung nicht gegeben werden.¹⁴

He sees the discussions on this text by Roman, Lutheran, Reformed, and Enthusiast theologians as inexhaustible and unproductive. But he does venture to add his own interpretation to the discussion:

Vielleicht verhalten sich Bad und Geist zueinander wie Jesus Tod zu Jesu Auferstehung; vielleicht bezeichnet das Bad (wie Tit. 2,14) den Tod Christi und die Geisterneuerung die Auferstehung Christi.¹⁵

¹⁴Ibid., p. 471.

¹⁵Ibid.

Thus Markus Barth has adequately stated the modern question whether Titus 3:5 refers to the sacrament of baptism. The complete answer can only be given with a full study of the text in its whole environment, as will be shown in the following chapter. Barth has attempted to answer this question in the negative but has by no means been convincing. One good point he has brought out, however, is that the emphasis in Titus 3:5 is on the redemptive work of Christ and this point is worth remembering.

CHAPTER VII

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE TEXT

As with every doctrine of the Christian Church, baptism has its Old Testament antecedents. New Testament baptism came into being in an environment of ritual washings, Jewish proselyte baptism and the like and must have been understood in this context by the early Christians. The question then arises whether the concept of baptismal regeneration would readily have been understood in this Jewish context, or whether it is something foreign to Jewish thought and was adopted through Greek influence as has sometimes been claimed. The answer to this should lead to a deeper understanding of Titus 3:5 and the concept of baptismal regeneration.

Jewish Purification Rites

The dramatic and dynamic symbolism of water had always played an important part in Old Testament times. God was often associated with water. The creation story begins with God's Spirit brooding over the waters; God is sanctified at the waters of Meribah when Moses smites the rock (Exodus 17:6-7; Numbers 20:13; 27:14); Jeremiah calls the Lord the "Fountain of living waters" (Jeremiah 2:13; 17:13); Ezekiel portrays the temple of God with life-giving waters flowing out from under it (Ezekiel 47:3-5). Further, water was often connected with the death of evil forces and the

salvation of God's people. Noah and his family escape through the Flood waters while the godless perish. Peter uses this story as a picture of baptism (1 Peter 3:18-22). Moses and the Israelites are saved while they go through the Red Sea led by God's Spirit while the Egyptian pursuers are drowned. Paul calls this a baptism "into Moses" (1 Corinthians 10:1-2). Also, water was sometimes used as a symbol for rebirth and renewal. This idea is stressed a number of times by the Prophets when they speak of the life-giving properties of water upon dry ground as a symbol of God's giving new life through His Spirit. Isaiah 44:3-4 is a good example of this:

For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
and streams on the dry ground;
I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants,
and my blessing on your offspring.
They shall spring up like grass amid waters,
like willows by flowing streams.¹

Another well-known example is Ezekiel 36:25-26 which speaks of being sprinkled with clean water and being given a new heart and a new spirit.

However, the most common use of water in the Old Testament religious life was for the many ritual cleansings. Before Aaron and his sons go before the altar in the tabernacle to minister they must wash their hands and feet in the bronze laver (λουτήρ in the LXX) "lest they die" (Exodus 30:17-21). Before consecration they must be washed with water (Exodus 40:12). Those taking part in sacrifices must cleanse

¹All Bible quotations in this chapter are from the Revised Standard Version.

themselves with water before and after (Leviticus 16:26,28; 22:6; 2 Chronicles 4:6; et cetera). Before a leper can be declared clean he must undergo washings and a sacrificial bird must be killed above running water (Leviticus 14, 2 Kings 5:10). In Numbers 19 the preparations for the Water for Impurity (מֵי טָהָרָה) are described. In the water the ashes of a red heifer are mixed and this mixture is sprinkled with a hyssop branch on a person who has become unclean through association with conception, menstruation, and death (Leviticus 12:2; 15; Numbers 19:13, 20-21). The atoning sacrifice of this red heifer "for the removal of sin" (Numbers 19:9) is looked upon as an ante-type of the sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 9:13).² This atonement administered through water certainly has an affinity with baptism as the administering rite of the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Edersheim points out that this is the only sin-offering in which a female animal is used and believes that this points to a deeper symbolical meaning of a new life of "freshness, fulness, and fruitfulness" through the removal of sin.³ Spiritual washing also is often symbolic of cleansing from sin (for example, Psalm 51:2,7; Isaiah 1:16; Jeremiah 2:22; 4:14). Often this

²Also in Heb. 12:12 the blood of Jesus is called a *ῥύπον καθαρισμὸν*, an obvious reference to the Water for Impurity which is called in the LXX, *ὕδωρ καθαρισμὸν*.

³Alfred Edersheim, The Temple: Its Ministry and Services as They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), pp. 349-350.

cleansing is spoken of as a complete, once-for-all purification with strong Messianic and eschatological overtones, such as in Zechariah 13:1; 14:8 and Ezekiel 36:25. Such a radical cleansing comes with Jesus the Messiah heralded by John the Baptist with his "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). So the Old Testament certainly gives an important background for New Testament baptism, and Dillistone is correct when he concludes:

Water is not just a sign of cleansing; it is a symbol of new creation and fertilisation and refreshment and regeneration. If its natural properties are kept in view they can be used as vivid analogies of processes within the life of the spiritual organism.⁴

Although the actual terminology of Titus 3:5 is not found anywhere in the Old Testament,⁵ the ideas of regeneration and renewal connected with a washing are not excluded.

The washings practised by the Qumran Community are sometimes regarded at least as part of the environment for New Testament baptism, especially the baptism of John. Frequent ritual washings were to be had by the members prior to the sacred meals, and other purification rites were probably performed frequently according to the Old Testament practices. In the Dead Sea Manual of Discipline the warning

⁴F. W. Dillistone, Christianity and Symbolism (London: Collins, 1955), p. 210.

⁵Παλιγγενεσία is not found in the LXX but in Job 14:14 the phrase εὐς ἂν πάλιν γένωμαι is used, to translate the Hebrew עַד־כִּי־אֶחְיֶה. Similarly λουτρόν is not found but the word λούτης occurs a number of times (Exodus 30:18,28; 31:9; et cetera).

is given that baptisms or washings do not cleanse and sanctify ex opere operato. The man who is stubborn towards God's will

cannot be cleared by mere ceremonies of atonement, nor cleansed by any waters of ablution, nor sanctified by immersion in lakes or rivers, nor purified in any bath. Unclean, unclean he remains so long as he rejects the government of God and refuses the discipline of communion with Him Only through the holy spirit can he achieve union with God's truth and be purged of all his iniquities. Only by a spirit of uprightness and humility can his sin be atoned.⁶

That an actual purification before God takes place in such a baptism is not denied but purification only takes place when the one who goes into the water shows repentance.⁷ When this repentance is shown then God works in the man

destroying every spirit of perversity from within his flesh and cleansing him by the holy spirit from all the effects of wickedness. Like waters of purification He will sprinkle upon him the spirit of truth, to cleanse him of all the abominations of falsehood and of all pollutions through the spirit of filth.⁸

Some, with good reason, take these references to point to a once-for-all baptism of initiation, not to be confused with the daily purifications.⁹ The expressions certainly bear

⁶The Manual of Discipline III:4-10, The Dead Sea Scriptures, translated with Introduction and Notes by Theodor H. Gaster (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., c.1956), pp. 42-43.

⁷The Manual of Discipline V:13, ibid., p. 48.

⁸The Manual of Discipline IV:20-21, ibid., p. 45.

⁹E.g., John Heron, "The Theology of Baptism," Scottish Journal of Theology, VIII (1955), 39; and Otto Betz, "Die Proselytentaufe der Qumransekte und die Taufe im Neuen Testament," Revue de Qumran, I (Oct. 1958), 218. F. F. Bruce, Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls (London: The Pater-noster Press, c.1956), p. 106, disagrees with this view.

similarities to Titus 3:5. Thus we would have parallels with New Testament baptism of initiation into the fellowship of God's people and God's covenant, with the need for repentance and humility, with an imputed righteousness, and with the renewal through the Holy Spirit. Moreover, it is quite probable that John the Baptist was for a time a member of the Qumran sect. If so, in later breaking away from the sect he transformed many of its ideas to a more immediate eschatological expectation, a more urgent call for repentance coupled with a once-for-all baptism for the remission of sins. This may very well be a bridge between Old Testament purification rites and New Testament baptism.¹⁰

Proselyte Baptism

Another bridge between Old Testament purification rites and New Testament baptism may very well be the Jewish baptism for proselytes. Whether proselyte baptism was practised to any extent before the coming of John the Baptist cannot be fully ascertained but there is good reason to believe that it was, in spite of the silence in some important authorities.¹¹

¹⁰ Vide W. H. Brownlee, "John the Baptist in the New Light of Ancient Scrolls," The Scrolls and the New Testament, edited by Krister Stendahl (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, c.1957), pp. 33-53; and G. R. Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd., c.1962), pp. 39-40.

¹¹ Cf. Joachim Jeremias, Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries, translated by David Cairns (London: SCM Press Ltd, c.1960), pp. 24-26; W. F. Flemington, The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism (London: SPCK, 1948), pp. 4-6; T. F.

Quite obviously proselyte baptism would hardly have been taken over from Christianity considering the enmity between the two. One good reason for taking it as being practised well before 70 A.D. is the discussion on proselyte baptism by the schools of Hillel and Shammai referred to in the Mishnah.¹² Here we also see that this baptism of initiation into Judaism was essentially an extension of the Old Testament purification rites, cleansing them of their former heathen defilement. This once-for-all baptism therefore closely resembles the initiatory purification of the Qumran community particularly since proselyte baptism is discussed in the Mishnah in connection with when a proselyte may participate in the passover meal. Proselytes must be baptized first just as converts to Christianity must be baptized before celebrating the Lord's Supper. Proselyte baptism was later even regarded by some rabbis as being of more importance than circumcision, which was still required of male proselytes.¹³

Once a proselyte is willing to accept the responsibilities

Torrance, "Proselyte Baptism," New Testament Studies, I (1954-1955), 154. This view is criticized by T. M. Taylor, "The Beginning of Jewish Proselyte Baptism," New Testament Studies, II (1955-1956), 193-98; and also by Frederick C. Grant, "Early Christian Baptism," Anglican Theological Review, XXVII (1945), 260-261.

¹² Pesahim 8:8 and Eduyoth 5:2, The Mishnah, translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and brief explanatory notes by Herbert Danby (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 148, 431.

¹³ Flemington, p. 6.

of becoming an Israelite he is circumcised, and after he is healed he is baptized. While still in the water he is instructed in some of the minor and major commandments, then "when he has immersed himself and ascended from the water he is an Israelite in every respect."¹⁴ Such a rebirth is spoken of in more explicit terms elsewhere thus: "The proselyte in his conversion (to Judaism) is like a newborn child." Or proselytes are spoken of as men who have risen from the dead, are newborn, and are forgiven of their sins.¹⁵ Thus in baptism the proselyte undergoes a radical change whereby his past life is done away altogether and he begins a new life in a different sphere and is given the full status of a newborn child. According to Jewish opinion,

God cannot therefore now chastise him for deeds done or duties neglected before his new birth. In other words, all former sins are done away by conversion and reception into the Jewish religious community through circumcision and baptism.¹⁶

This renewal which took place at baptism was in no sense basically a moral renewal, although such a moral renewal was hoped for in the future. Essentially the rebirth in baptism was the imparting of a new legal status by God and recognized by man. This did not, however, make baptism a mere empty

¹⁴Yebamoth 47b, quoted by A. Cohen, Everyman's Talmud (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., c.1932), p. 65.

¹⁵Jeremias, pp. 32-33.

¹⁶George Foot Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of Tannaim (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, c.1927), I, 335.

ceremony for it was un-Jewish to make any distinction between the outward and material and the inward and spiritual. The Jews always regarded body and soul as an indissoluble unity, and what happened to the one would inevitably affect the other.¹⁷ So the washing of the body in this baptism of initiation was regarded as affecting the soul by bringing it to a new status and directing it to a new life.

The similarities, then, between Jewish proselyte baptism and New Testament baptism are significant. It is a once-for-all washing of initiation which has strong implication for the new life in both. The concept of baptismal regeneration is found in both, and it is important to remember that in the Jewish washing the regeneration was not thought of as a magical, moral change but rather as a new legal status which gave a new power to live a new and different life. It is very likely that Paul, as writer of Titus 3:5, was influenced by this idea through studying under Gamaliel I so that when he spoke of the "washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" he thought of it essentially as God bestowing a new status on the person baptized--no longer under the law but now under the Gospel, led by God's Spirit to a God-filled life. The moral change then results from this and is inseparable from it but is not an essential part of baptism.

¹⁷Flemington, pp. 10-11.

Hellenistic Baptism

The Greek Mystery Religions, which were disseminated widely by Roman soldiers, have often been regarded as influencing the doctrine of Christian baptism, and especially Paul's baptismal terminology. Much has been made of the fact that Paul was from Tarsus, a city where the Mysteries of Mithra had many followers.¹⁸ It is believed that he probably learned something of these Mysteries and of their ideas of regeneration and identification with dying and rising saviour-gods, and that he used these ideas to bring the Christian faith to the Gentiles in the Roman Empire who were either under the influence of or were acquainted with the Greek Mystery religions.¹⁹ Yet this is hardly likely considering Paul's intense hatred for idolatry or anything that even suggested syncretism. Moreover, his fanaticism for Judaism in his early years would not have allowed any influence by the Mystery religions.

However, the Mystery religions did have an initiation by baptism connected with the idea of regeneration and remission of sins. This is mentioned by some of the early Church Fathers such as Justin Martyr and Tertullian. Tertullian says:

¹⁸Franz Cumont, The Mysteries of Mithra, trans. from the 2nd revised French edition by Thomas J. McCormack (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1956), pp. 31-32.

¹⁹Cf. John B. Noss, Man's Religions (Revised edition; New York: The Macmillan Company, c.1956), pp. 588, 591.

In certain Mysteries, e.g. of Isis and Mithra, it is by baptism (per lavacrum) that members are initiated. . . . In the Apollinarian and Eleusinian rites they are baptized, and they imagine that the result of this baptism is regeneration and the remission of the penalties of their sins.²⁰

Those undergoing initiation into the Mysteries believed that through a mysterious intimacy with their God they were passing through death to a new life and became new creatures.

From the so-called Liturgy of Mithra comes a Hymn of Regeneration which sounds very much like a baptismal prayer of the medieval church:

Hail, Lord, potentate of water; hail, ruler of earth; hail, master of spirit. . . . Lord, having been regenerated, I depart in exaltation, and having been exalted I die. Born again for rebirth of that life--giving birth, and delivered unto death, I go the way, as thou hast established, as thou hast decreed, as thou hast created the sacrament.²¹

This regeneration, however, was different from the baptismal regeneration of Christianity. The actual bath was really unimportant in the whole set-up of the Mystery initiations and so was repeated with each of the seven initiation rites.²² Regeneration came about through ecstasy and was the prerogative only of those who reached the final stages and knew the Mysteries. Christian baptism, on the other hand, is a once-

²⁰Quoted by S. Angus, The Mystery Religions and Christianity: A Study in the Religious Background of Early Christianity (London: John Murray, 1925), p. 81.

²¹Ibid., p. 100.

²²Cumont, p. 157.

for-all sacrament, knows no ecstasy, and its regeneration is offered to all. It cannot be ascertained when the Mystery religions arose nor whether Tertullian's assertion is correct that the Mystery religions as known then were a satanic mimicry of Christianity. The New Testament Church has enough background for baptismal regeneration in Judaism without taking their ideas from conflicting ideologies.

That the actual word *παλιγγενεσία* was borrowed from the Greek world cannot be denied. It is only found in Titus 3:5 and Matthew 19:28 in the New Testament. But it was used often by the Stoics to describe their belief in the periodic renewal of the world through fire.²³ It was also used as a medical term for recovery from illness or even the reappearance of an illness, as a political term for restoration to one's fatherland, and also as a legal or poetical term.²⁴ From this we see that *παλιγγενεσία* was a common Greek term which Paul used in Titus 3:5 giving it a deeper and more significant meaning than is found in the Greek world.

New Testament Baptism

In the New Testament regeneration and renewal are the basic essential elements of the Christian faith. Christianity

²³Cf. Joseph Dey, *Παλιγγενεσία*, Ein Beitrag zur Klärung der religionsgeschichtlichen Bedeutung von Tit. 3.5 (Muenster: Aschendorffschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1937), pp. 8-9.

²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 28-30.

is, indeed, the life under the new covenant, the new life, a new creation, a beginning of the renewal which reaches its completeness and perfection in the life to come--the new heaven and the new earth. The initiation into this new covenant life is through the sacrament of baptism, and in order to see what part baptism plays in actually bringing about the new creation a close examination of the baptismal references is necessary.

The importance of baptism as an entry into the new life of the Messianic era is already emphasized by John the Baptist. John came like a true Old Testament prophet calling the people to repentance, but his call to repentance was more than a call to a godly life. It was conditioned by the drawing near of the Kingdom of God to be inaugurated by the long expected Messiah, and it was a call to prepare oneself to become a member of the future kingdom. Baptism also was no mere purification rite. Here it has points of contact with Qumran and proselyte baptism: it was a once-for-all rite through which one entered the community of the people of God--in this case, the community of the messianic people of God. Those who underwent this baptism believed they were cleansed of their sins and could be sure of their membership in the future messianic community. This already has overtones of regeneration and renewal. But unlike proselyte baptism this baptism of John was for Jews who were moved to repentance and promised to live a new life in God.

Thus John's baptism was called a *βάπτισμα μετανοίας σὺν ἀφεσὶν ἁμαρτιῶν* (Mark 1:4). Although the emphasis has been placed in this context on repentance (as in Matthew 3:2-12), this does not mean that the new life inaugurated in baptism is the consequence of this repentance. It is the forgiveness of sins declared in baptism that gives power for the new life-- God's act alone. Man's repentance brings him to the state of accepting the forgiveness offered him by God in baptism. With the idea of baptism cleansing of sins for entry into the new messianic community we can see the embryo of the concept of baptismal regeneration.

With the appearance of Jesus the Messiah the whole concept of a new covenant and a new creation was intensified. Jesus was baptized by John in order "to fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15) and He receives the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and acknowledgement of His Sonship. Evidently, this baptism marked not only the beginning of His ministry but also the beginning of His atoning work by His placing Himself voluntarily under the will of God and thus expressing His union with sinful mankind. The words of the Father, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11) are an echo of Isaiah 42:1, the verse which introduces the Servant Songs. The Father, therefore, was identifying Christ with the *אֲדָמָה* of Isaiah, who in His baptism was signifying that He

as the only righteous One, was to enter vicariously into 'the sin of the many' (Isa. 53,12), to bear it as his

own sin to as to make the many participant in his righteousness. It is baptism into solidarity with sinners and the initiation of redemptive action. . . . It was his consecration to death. Only so was 'all righteousness' fulfilled (Matt. 3. 15). The messianic kingdom was established only through the fact that he, 'the righteous one, my servant,' makes many righteous by bearing their iniquities (Isa. 53. 11).²⁵

In His baptism He became one with man and thus took upon Himself the guilt of man's sins. Thus man also through his baptism becomes one with Christ and receives unto himself the righteousness of Christ. It is not merely a cleansing from sin but a rebirth through participation in Christ. This means for the baptized a full participation in Christ--a participation in His baptism, His suffering, His death, His resurrection. Just as Christ received an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and recognition of His Sonship in His baptism, so those who are baptized into Christ receive an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and are received by God as His sons and heirs. This connection between the two baptisms is clearly seen in Titus 3:5-7. The inseparable connection of Christ's baptism and His whole atoning work was acknowledged by Him when He declared that He must be baptized "to fulfil all righteousness." But it was also acknowledged in His reference to His suffering and death as a baptism (Luke 12:50 and Mark

²⁵Theological Commission on Christ and the Church, One Lord, One Baptism: World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order Report on the Divine Trinity and the Unity of the Church and Report on the Meaning of Baptism (London: SCM Press Ltd., c.1960), p. 53. Cf. also Oscar Cullmann, Baptism in the New Testament, translated by J. K. S. Reid (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1950), pp. 16-18.

10:38). The Christian's total involvement in Christ is stressed when Christ tells His disciples concerning His suffering and death: "With the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized" (Mark 10:39). It follows that the involvement is also in Christ's resurrection to a new life. Although in Jesus' preaching this new life is not directly connected with baptism, nevertheless, the connection is there and there is good reason for retaining Mark 10:13-16 and its parallels in the baptismal liturgy. The connection is more easily seen in the light of Matthew 18:3 where Jesus tells His disciples: "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Here, however, Jesus puts the emphasis on the human attitude whereas in John 3:5 where he speaks of the necessity of being born again through baptism, the emphasis is on God's action.²⁶ Jesus does use the word *παλιγγενεσία* (Matthew 19:28) though not in the sense of an individual regeneration, but rather in the sense of the world rebirth in the life to come. This world regeneration, however, is the completion of the individual's regeneration as the context clearly shows. There both are the work of God: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

Turning to the writings of John the Evangelist we come

²⁶Jeremias, pp. 51-52, believes that these formulations are all from one and the same saying of Jesus. But the similarity in word structure is not enough evidence for that although the associations are similar.

to that famous passage, John 3:3-5, where the Pharisee, Nicodemus, comes to Jesus to enquire concerning His teachings. Jesus tells him that if anyone wants to see the kingdom of God he must be born again (γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν). When Nicodemus professes lack of understanding Jesus explains being born anew as being born of water and the Spirit (γεννηθῆναι ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος --verse 5). This is an explanation that any Jew would have understood at this time. For John the Baptist had been baptizing for repentance and professing that his baptism was only of water whereas the coming Messiah would baptize also with the Holy Spirit. The Evangelist makes sure he emphasizes this point as preparation for this Nicodemus account (John 1:26-33). So in order to be born anew, Jesus explains, one must in true faith undergo His baptism of water and the Spirit which He has ordained and His disciples practise (John 3:26; 4:1). This new birth from God, Jesus further explains, is no mystic or physical thing. For just as the Spirit is present wherever He wills and is not physically identifiable, so he who is born of God in baptism is spiritually reborn. It is very clear from this that the stress is on the action of God and that it is God who in baptism thus begets spiritual children. This is one manifestation of the gratia praeveniens maintained in all Christ's teachings and stressed in John's writings (Compare John 15:16; 1 John 4:10,19).²⁷ But necessity of faith and the spiritual

²⁷Cullmann, pp. 33-34.

growth which must inevitably follow the spiritual birth are likewise emphasized and given their due place. In the light of John 3:3-5 it is evident that John has baptism in mind whenever he speaks of being born of God. Thus those who receive Christ and believe in Him are given the *ἐξουσία* to become the *τέκνα θεοῦ*. Such are born "not of blood nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12,13). Such a person born of God through the baptism of water and the Spirit manifests the righteousness of God in him (1 John 2:29), he purifies himself in preparation for meeting his Father (1 John 3:1-3), he does not commit sin (1 John 3:9,10; 5:18), he believes in Jesus as the Messiah, loves the Father, overcomes the world (1 John 5:1-4), and lives his new life in accordance with the new law of love (John 13:34; 1 John 2:7,8; 2 John 5). This new birth with the new life reaches its culmination in the life to come, the new heaven and the new earth where all things are made new (Revelation 21:1,5). Here we have the whole picture of baptismal regeneration with the consequent renewal by the Holy Spirit and its ultimate completion described in great detail. Titus 3:5 makes a good summary statement of this.

Baptism and the receiving of the gift of the Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles must be understood in the light of the above. In Acts 1:5 Jesus tells His disciples: "John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." He later explains this to

mean that they will receive *δωκίμια* and will be His witnesses to the end of the earth (1:8). This appears to be the baptism He gives--of water and the Spirit, although baptism by water and the receiving of the special gift of the Spirit are often separate in point of time yet inseparable sacramentally. This baptism is no longer the preparatory act of John's baptism but it is the baptism of reception into the Kingdom and gives power to live and witness as members of the Kingdom. This, essentially, is the difference between the two baptisms. Yet the gift of the Holy Spirit is not to be separated from baptism into Christ even though it may be received before actual baptism or some time after baptism. The Acts offer instances of this. In Acts 2:38 the people at Pentecost, brought to repentance by Peter's preaching, ask what they should do and Peter answers: "Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." So three thousand of them were baptized, and although no special manifestation is mentioned it must be taken for granted that they did receive the Holy Spirit, the power to be Christ's witnesses to the end of the Earth. Whether this gift to them had any supernatural manifestation or not is unimportant. In the final analysis the thing that counts is not the power to do miracles but the power to witness and this was why the Holy Spirit was given. This is true also in regard to Acts 8:12-17 where we have the account of the

Samaritans who are baptized by Philip but only receive the Holy Spirit when Peter and John come and lay hands on them. This obviously refers to some special gift with supernatural manifestations. In Acts 10:44-48 the order is reversed. The Gentiles receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (before they are baptized) after having heard the preaching of the gospel. In consequence of this Peter baptizes them thus completing the new birth in Christ by water and the Spirit. In Acts 19:1-6 baptism in Christ and even the special gift of the Holy Spirit are spoken of as inseparable. These references are important for the understanding of baptismal regeneration and the consequent renewal. Thus regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit should not be thought of as separate from baptism, and the moral change and renewal must not be expected to be simultaneous in time with the act of baptismal regeneration for God uses freedom as to the time and manner of bestowing His Holy Spirit.

In the First Letter of Peter the verb ἀναγεννᾶν is used twice (1 Peter 1:3,23) although it is not found anywhere else in the New Testament, or in classical Greek. But the term used in John 3:3-5, γεννᾶσθαι ἑνὶ ὕδατι, is basically the same and Justin Martyr in his *Apology* always used ἀναγεννᾶν in place of John's term.²⁸ The close affinity with παλιγγενεσία, too, is quite obvious. As we found in our discussion of

²⁸Vide Chapter II of this thesis, p. 7.

John 3:5 Jesus in His talk with Nicodemus used the term "being born anew" as synonymous with "being born of water and the Spirit," in other words, as a term for Christian baptism. It is only natural, therefore, that Peter should use this same terminology as a reference to baptism. Moreover, when we take into consideration Peter's familiarity with Paul's letters and Pauline thought (2 Peter 3:15-16) we note a similarity in ideas. In 1 Peter 1:3 ἀναγεννᾶν is explicitly connected with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and inheritance of eternal life. We find these same associations in such baptismal references as Romans 6:3-11 and Titus 3:7. In 1 Peter 1:23 and 2:2 regeneration is explicitly connected with the living and abiding word of God as baptism is in Ephesians 5:26. Providing, then, that we may take ἀναγεννᾶν in these verses as referring to baptism we have a strong case for baptismal regeneration in the Petrine letters. This is further strengthened in a direct reference to baptism in 1 Peter 3:19-21. There Peter likens baptism to the Flood of Noah's time and asserts that as Noah was saved through the water of the Flood so Christians are saved through baptism. This salvation through baptism, Peter explains, is not because of a physical cleansing but because of a spiritual one which is to lead to a sanctified life--"not as removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience." Also in this context the power of baptism is based upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ

(verse 21). As far as baptism is concerned, then, the implication in 1 Peter is that baptism is a regeneration by which the person baptized is given a new life to be nurtured by hope in the resurrection and the hearing of the living and abiding Word of God. He is cleansed of his sins and directed towards God, and with the help of the Holy Spirit is able to retain a clear conscience.

In other non-Pauline writings we may have two indirect references to baptismal regeneration in Hebrews 6:6 and James 1:18. In Hebrews 6:6 definite baptismal terms are used, such as the phrase *παλιν ἀνακαίνισιν εἰς μετανοίαν*. This renewal had already been described in verse 4 as enlightenment (*φωτισθέντας*), a term later used in the Church as a synonym for baptism. Here at least it is used as a term for entry into the Christian Church as it is in Hebrews 10:32. But as entry into the Church was by baptism the term may very well refer to baptism here, particularly since those who are "enlightened" become "partakers" of the Holy Spirit (verse 4). Significant also are the references to the blessings which result from enlightenment--tasting the heavenly gift, the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, being a partaker of the Holy Spirit. This could well be a description of the blessings God bestows through baptismal regeneration. James 1:18 asserts that God begat (*ἀπεκύησεν*) us by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures. This idea fits in very well with

the baptismal terminology as a rebirth from God and may refer to the moment of baptism.²⁹

In the Pauline letters the concepts of regeneration and renewal are present everywhere. Sometimes Paul emphasizes regeneration as objective justification separately, sometimes he combines the two concepts, sometimes he emphasizes renewal as sanctification and living the new life in Christ. He may bring baptism into one of these emphases as an integral part. The question therefore arises: Is baptism for Paul simply a bestowing of objective justification by God upon a passive subject, is it both the conferring of the forgiveness of sins and a coming about of a moral change in the person baptized, or is it to be understood purely as a moral change dependent upon the faith of the person baptized? All of these views have been held at various times. However, basic to our understanding of Pauline theology is his doctrine of gratia praeveniens. This is clearly set down in Romans 5:8-10:

God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

The same thought is found in Ephesians 1:5: "He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ." Also in

²⁹Cf. Joseph B. Mayor, The Epistle of St. James: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, Comments and Further Studies in the Epistle of St. James (Reprinted from the revised 3rd edition of 1913; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954), pp. 200-03.

Ephesians 2:4,5:

God who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).

A parallel to this passage is found in Colossians 2:12,13 where again God makes us alive together with Christ after being dead in trespasses and sins, but here this dying and rising is specifically spoken of as being appropriated to us by baptism. Ephesians 5:16 also speaks of God's prevenient grace bestowed on man in baptism, cleansing him τῇ λουτρῇ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι. Similarly in 1 Corinthians 6:11 Paul states that the difference between the unrighteous who do not inherit the Kingdom of God and those who do is that the latter who were unrighteous have been washed (ἀπελούεσθαι), sanctified and justified "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." In all these passages and others (for example, 1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 5:17,18; Gal. 6:15) God is mentioned as imputing His righteousness to the sinner reconciled to Him through the atoning sacrifice of His Son. This imputed righteousness is said to be bestowed in baptism bringing about a new creation. This does not entail any moral change although a moral change must obviously follow as such an imputed righteousness must be received at some time by faith. This inseparable connection between justification and sanctification is further brought out in other Pauline references to baptism and regeneration. The best known example is Romans 6:3-11 where Paul states that through

receiving the blessings of Christ's death and resurrection given us in baptism we thus participate in His death and resurrection and are raised together with Him so that we might walk in newness of life (καινότητι ζωῆς). Thus through this regeneration bestowed on the baptized there follows a new life in Christ which readily participates in His suffering as well as His glory. This is quite a common idea in Paul's writings (compare Rom. 8:16,21; 2 Cor. 4:11; Gal. 2:19-20; 3:26-27; 6:14-15; Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:12-13). But it is necessary for the proper understanding of baptismal regeneration to keep justification and sanctification separate theoretically in baptism although in practice they are inseparable. Paul nowhere confuses these two parts. The actual regeneration in baptism consists in the bestowal of God's imputed righteousness through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But just as life and growth must follow natural birth so new life and growth must follow rebirth in God. When Paul, therefore, mentions renewal in connection with baptism, that renewal is not an essential part of baptismal regeneration although it must be an essential part of the new life of the baptized. This too is stressed continually by Paul. Dead now, he says, to that which held us captive we must now serve God in the new life of the Spirit (ἐν καινότητι πνεύματος -- Rom. 7:6); we must be transformed (ἀνταναστήσει) by the renewal of the mind (Rom. 12:2); we are being changed (μεταμορφούμεθα) into the likeness of the Lord by degrees through the Spirit

(2 Cor. 3:18); our inner nature is being renewed (ἀνταναίνοῦται) day by day (2 Cor. 4:16); we must put on the new man (Eph. 4:23; Col. 3:10). This renewal comes about in man through the working of the Holy Spirit coming to man in baptism even though he may have received the Spirit some time before or after the actual time of this baptism.

So the teaching on baptismal regeneration is basically the same throughout the whole of the New Testament. The synoptic gospels emphasize the new life which must follow baptism, John's Gospel emphasizes the rebirth from God, both aspects are touched on in other New Testament writings, and in Paul's letters both are given much attention and the correct distinction between regeneration and renewal is observed while their inseparable connection in baptism is acknowledged. The phrase in Titus 3:5, "the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit;" becomes a perfect summary of the whole New Testament teaching.

The Text in its Environment

Titus 3:5 comes in a context in which Paul is encouraging Titus to carry out the duties of the ministry--to exhort his members to show forth the works of the new life which has been given them by the grace of God and the working of His Spirit. Paul calls Titus to remember the change which he himself has experienced, a change from the old life of wickedness to the new life which God in His mercy and loving

kindness brought about "by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit." God's gift of this new life was made possible through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ our Saviour through whom we are justified and made heirs in hope of eternal life. This new birth and its consequent new life must be manifest in the lives of all who receive it. Therefore Paul tells Titus: "I desire you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to apply themselves to good deeds" (Titus 3:8). Titus 3:4-7, therefore, is actually a parallel and extension of Titus 2:11-14 where Paul has previously spoken of the appearance of God's grace for the salvation of all men and the hope man has through Christ, which form the motivation for good deeds. The λουτρὸν παλιγγενεσίας in 3:5 could well be an explanation of the καθαρίσιν in 2:14. But it must be noted that in both verses the terms are intimately involved in the redemptive work of Christ, and this is a common stress in Paul's doctrine of baptism. However, Titus 3:4-7 goes a little further and puts baptismal regeneration in the whole sphere of divine action. It is the work of God our Saviour who recreates by virtue of His own mercy, the work of the Holy Spirit who renews, the work of Jesus Christ who justifies by His grace and makes heirs in hope of eternal life. This baptismal regeneration and renewal are clearly the work of the Triune God and not the work of man. They are surrounded by the terms of the Good News: βασιλεία, ἔλεος, δικαιοσύνη,

χάρις, κληρονομία, ἐλπίς ζωῆς αἰωνίου. These ideas are all bound up in the phrase λουτρόν παλιγγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως

The word λουτρόν is only found in one other place in the New Testament--in Ephesians 5:26. It is derived from the verb λούειν meaning to wash, to bathe. Some have assumed that λουτρόν designates the material apparatus of baptism and translate it as laver, or bath. But to take it in the active sense as washing is more appropriate and this is backed up by its use throughout Greek literature.³⁰ In Ephesians 5:26 λουτρόν is used in the phrase καθαρίσας τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι as the cleansing washing of baptism which Christ through His redemptive work has prepared for His Church. It is significant here that ἐν ῥήματι is added to emphasize that the cleansing power of the λουτροῦ is not in the water itself but proceeds from the Word which brings to the washing the saving work of Christ. This same idea is inherent in the word λουτρόν in Titus 3:5 as the context shows.

Παλιγγενεσία is only found here and in Matthew 19:28 in the New Testament. As has been mentioned above, the context in both cases definitely points to a difference of meaning. Matthew 19:28 speaks of a universal regeneration while Titus 3:5 deals with individual rebirth. But yet the two are connected, for the rebirth in baptism only reaches

³⁰E. K. Simpson, The Pastoral Epistles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary (London: The Tyndale Press, 1954), pp. 114-115.

its completion and perfection in the final resurrection and restoration which Jesus calls the ultimate *παλιγγενεσία* of the whole redeemed creation. The eschatological aspect of *παλιγγενεσία* in Titus 3:5 is made clear by the additional phrase *κληρονόμοι κατ' ἐλπίδα ζωῆς αἰωνίου*. Paul states this eschatology very precisely in 2 Corinthians 5:17 when he says: "If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come." The actual meaning of *παλιγγενεσία* is clear from its etymology from *πάλιν*, again, and *γίνομαι*, be born, become. It is the new birth unto God of the sinner in contrast to the natural birth unto sin, a spiritual birth in contrast to the physical birth. Connected with *λουτρόν* this word certainly reflects the central importance ascribed to baptism in the early Church. It makes of it, as Gealy puts it,

the meeting place where cosmology is vanquished by eschatology, the beginning by the end, the temporal by the eternal, sin by righteousness, servitude by freedom, corruption by incorruption, and death by resurrection. Thus baptism became the focal point for the entire pattern of Christian redemption.³¹

The very meaning of the word rules out any action of faith of man as the means of regeneration and points solely to the work of God in bestowing His grace and giving man the power to live as His child. This is the emphasis Paul is making in using this term. Man's faith must ultimately accept this

³¹Fred D. Gealy, "The Epistle to Titus," The Interpreter's Bible, edited by George Arthur Buttrick and associates (New York: Abingdon Press, c.1955), XI, 545.

work of God and respond to it, but the decisive act of regeneration is God's. Thus *παλιγγενεσία* itself cannot be described as a moral change wrought in man but rather a new status bestowed on him.

The word *ἀνακαίνωσις*, renewal, has often been taken as a synonym for *παλιγγενεσία*. But while the two words are inseparably connected *ἀνακαίνωσις* rather denotes the new life that must follow the new birth. This is where the moral change comes about. It is the continual growth of the Christian as a child of God through the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, and it is based on the regeneration in baptism at which time justification by grace has been bestowed. Nevertheless, the words must not be separated from each other but must be taken as co-ordinate genitives alike dependent on *λουτροῦ* in order to be faithful to the Greek. Paul is here speaking of one baptism which incorporates the baptismal rite but continues throughout the Christian's life as a suppressing of the old nature and a daily coming forth of the new man by the power of the Holy Spirit. Baptismal regeneration, however, refers only to the new birth which God bestows and in which man plays no part at all. For this reason the difference in meaning between *παλιγγενεσία* and *ἀνακαίνωσις* must be observed.

It is significant that faith is not mentioned in this context. This does not mean that faith is not necessary for baptism; the necessity of faith in accepting what God

has done in baptism so often mentioned in Paul's writings. Yet the reference to faith does not occur in most Pauline baptismal sayings and this is significant.³² It can be presumed from this that although faith is necessary it is not necessarily required as a prerequisite for the baptismal act. This is in complete agreement with baptismal regeneration as an act of God alone who bestows the New Covenant just as He bestowed the Old Covenant in Circumcision. Baptism is not simply a "meeting of God and man in grace and faith, a spiritual transaction,"³³ but primarily an act of God to which man responds in faith and life. Only when this is clearly understood can the doctrine of baptismal regeneration be seen in its right perspective.

³²

E.g. Rom. 6:1-11; 1 Cor. 6:11; 12:13; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 5:25-27; Col. 1:13-14; 2:15.

³³Beasley-Murray, p. 209.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

In this thesis various interpretations of Titus 3:5 and various teachings concerning baptismal regeneration from the time of the New Testament Church to the present day have been reviewed and examined. This has shown how the interpretations have differed widely, reaching from one extreme to the other. Part of the reason for making this review has been to see how these different interpretations have come about. Has the New Testament teaching on baptism and regeneration been so ambiguous that it has encouraged these differences? This review has shown that the problem is not the clarity of the New Testament but rather that theologians have tended to rely more on their theological and intellectual environment than on the clear word of Scripture. There has always been a tendency to understand New Testament thought according to one's own environment rather than according to the environment which produced it. Thus the various theological traditions have always influenced the interpretations of our text and the understandings of baptismal regeneration. Only when theologians have tried to put aside their various traditions, to break away from the process of action and reaction, and to study the New Testament in its historical environment have they been able to reach anything resembling general agreement. This has been hinted at already in the examination

of the various traditions.

The Early Christian Church had no traditions except the New Testament and so baptism was understood essentially as God's act of bestowing upon the individual the atoning work of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit by which divine power the person baptized would rise to newness of life. Thus man through baptism was changed from a child of nature to a child of God and was given the power to live as God's child. This was known as baptismal regeneration and was understood as being essentially a change of status before God coupled with the gift of the Holy Spirit by whose power a moral and spiritual change might be begun. But other ideas were allowed to creep in to the detriment of the doctrine and these became established as part of the Church's tradition. Tertullian, in seeking something tangible in spiritual things, tried to materialize grace and spoke of the Holy Spirit as having "corporeal substance." This began a false approach to baptism and emphasized saving "qualities" inherent in the sacrament rather than directing participants to the grace of Christ bestowed by God upon them. Cyprian made the sacrament dependent upon the authority of the Church and the office of Catholic bishops and thus decentralized the authority of God. Some looked upon baptism as only wiping away past sins in a mechanical fashion. Thus arose the false idea of baptism having a power of its own, and the false need for an additional sacrament of penance. Baptism

took on an "indelible character" and became the means for infusing a Tertullian-type grace mechanically into the individual. Thus this grace was looked upon as a quality detachable from the work of God. As the role of the liturgies became more prominent the sacrament of baptism was degraded to a magical rite. Mystical powers were ascribed to oil and salt as well as to the water and numerous exorcisms were added to the rite to indulge the current superstitious beliefs. The reaction against this religious emotionalism was the barren intellectualism of the scholastics who did nothing but seek to rationalize the false concepts of baptismal regeneration they had inherited. Their baptismal formulations are basically still the same in the Roman Church today.

Luther reacted against the reliance on erring traditions and led the return to reliance in God's Word. In this he also reacted against the degraded baptismal regeneration being taught at that time and raised it up to a close relationship with the central doctrine of the Christian faith, justification by grace through faith. Consequently, he emphasized the importance of faith in accepting the essential thing of baptism--that in baptism God is bestowing upon the sinner His justification because of Christ's vicarious sacrifice. In other words, God was imputing His righteousness to the sinner through baptism instead of counting his sins against him. Hence Luther understood baptismal regeneration primarily as a change in status and

not as a moral change. Melancthon, in his desire to smooth over Lutheran differences with the Roman Church, only brought confusion and misunderstanding to Luther's concept so that the theologians who drew up the Formula of Concord perpetuated his confusion by sometimes adding sanctification to baptismal regeneration. The Orthodox theologians followed this error by speaking of baptismal regeneration as both instantaneous and successive. The Pietist movement, which followed as a reaction to the period of Orthodoxy, tended to separate baptism and regeneration, understanding the latter as a real moral transformation in the person. Since then the Lutheran Church has echoed the slight variations between Luther and the Confessions in understanding baptismal regeneration and Titus 3:5. Sometimes, though, some Lutherans have failed to keep the Church's central doctrine of justification by grace through faith central also in baptism.

The Reformed tradition is seen as a more extreme reaction to the errors of the Roman Church. Zwingli was an iconoclast. He rejected the concept of baptismal regeneration along with the error of the Roman Church which had surrounded it. Hence the central concept of baptism was missing and left only its shell--man's faith. So baptism simply became an expression of man's faith. Calvin emphasized faith too but he also held that baptism truly is a "washing of regeneration" and that it is efficacious insofar as it seals and confirms the atoning sacrifice to the sinner. Calvin almost came to

agreement with Luther's understanding of baptismal regeneration. But he always feared lest he be misunderstood as teaching the Roman error of an ex opere operato baptism, so he always wavered between Lutheran and Zwinglian views of the sacrament. Nevertheless, as long as he acknowledged the efficacy of baptism he taught a baptismal regeneration. Men who have followed in the Reformed tradition have generally moved in the stream somewhere between Zwingli and Calvin, some holding to the concept of baptismal regeneration, others, including Karl Barth, rejecting it.

However, some have broken away from traditional lines. The Church of Scotland has been a good example of this and has come up with a new statement on baptismal regeneration which finds its true central place in the doctrine of baptism. It is seen as God's act alone by which He bestows a new status upon the baptized. This is virtually the same as Luther taught. Other changes have not been so radical but there has been a general move towards holding to a concept of baptism which is very much akin to that of the Early Church as it was also expressed by Luther. Some are only prevented from agreeing with Luther by their desire to retain some human element in their ideas of baptismal regeneration, so they add the element of man's faith or move it into the realm of sanctification by speaking of a moral regeneration. These human additions cause no end of confusion in the understanding of the doctrine of baptism as a whole. An instance of this

has been Markus Barth who has consequently found Titus 3:5 difficult to understand in such a context. His argument has been that Titus 3:5 cannot therefore refer to baptism. But his arguments have remained unconvincing.

Finally, a study of Titus 3:5 and the whole idea of baptismal regeneration has been undertaken along historico-critical line, studying especially the whole environment. This has shown very clearly that the concept of baptismal regeneration would have been readily understood and accepted as natural and necessary. Here it is seen that baptismal regeneration is regarded as God's act of bestowing the benefits of the whole work of Christ upon the person being baptized. All sin is forgiven, Christ's righteousness is imputed, the Holy Spirit is given, and through this a new child is spiritually born to live his life in Christ. This is not essentially a moral change but a change in status which leads through faith to a moral change. Man plays no part in his regeneration for this is God's act alone but the renewal must follow inseparably as life follows birth, otherwise the regeneration is negated. This conclusion vindicates Luther's position and the position now held by the Church of Scotland.

When this understanding of Titus 3:5 and baptismal regeneration is upheld, the problems in the doctrine of baptism which have continually reared their heads are easily dissolved for this understanding of baptismal regeneration

is the articulus cadentis et stantis doctrinae baptismi.

Infant baptism, the relationship of faith, the relationship of baptism and conversion can only be properly understood when studied in the light of this concept.

Throughout the whole history of the Church Titus 3:5 has remained as one of the most important baptismal proof-texts, partly because it speaks of baptism as the washing of regeneration and partly because it is a good summary statement on baptism. Yet few have really made a proper study of the text in its whole environment and context and because of this there have been misunderstandings about its true meaning. Titus 3:5 must continue to retain its place as one of the principal texts on baptism because it deals with the essential part of baptism--baptismal regeneration. Hence the study of this text has proved well worthwhile.

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